ASPECTS OF THE MIDDLE WAY:
A STUDY OF THE MĀDHYAMIKA KĀRIKĀS OF NĀGĀRJUNA IN THE LIGHT OF THE PERFECTION OF WISDOM

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of the present study is to explore some of the fundamental concepts of two of the most basic Mahayana texts, the *Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Verses* (*Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā*) and Nagarjuna's *Stanzas on the Middle Way* (*Mādhyamika Kārikās*). The intention is to clarify the premises upon which both of these texts rest, and the essential congruence of their respective approaches to the Buddhist problem of the nature, origin, and elimination of mental suffering.

Chapter I presents an analysis of those doctrines of the *Perfection of Wisdom* which are most relevant to the understanding of the *Kārikās*. Perfect wisdom is defined both as the state of enlightenment and as an essential aspect of the nature of things in general: both the enlightened consciousness and the nature of external reality are characterized by being unattached, "isolated" (*vivikta*), and unrelatable to each other. This characteristic of the non-relatedness of things is shown to follow necessarily from the more basic premise that all things are empty of "own-being" or self-existence (*svabhāva*). The chapter continues with a discussion

of the implications of the doctrine of no own-being. All conceptualization is seen to be the fabrication (vikalpa) of consciousness in its attempt to cling to the own-being of an experienced world; therefore all thought about reality is nothing more than thought about thought. Furthermore, since no concept refers to a reality, no concept of relationship between things refers to reality either. In short, reality is essentially paradoxic: contrary to or isolated from all "opinion" about it, including Buddhist doctrinal opinion. The method of the Perfection of Wisdom is to carry the use of verbal paradox to an extreme.

Chapter II applies the same pattern of analysis used in the first Chapter to the Mādhyamika Kārikās. The purpose of the Kārikās is to demonstrate the use of the doctrine of dependent origination, or emptiness, as the remedy for all dependence (upādāna) upon conceptual fabrication. Concepts are the result of fabricating own-being for the contents of experience, in the attempt to depend upon things through the attribution to them of self-identity and relationships between identities. The full implication of this idea is the burden of the Kārikās: dependent origination can be applied to the logical structure of concepts themselves, with the result that all concepts, including those of Buddhist teaching, are shown to be dependent for their "being," i.e., their meaning, upon other concepts which form their context. The dependency of the unenlightened consciousness is paralleled by the logical interdependence of concepts; the method of the Kārikās is to further the cessation of the mind's dependency through systematic "de-fabrication" of concepts. In order to carry this program out, the Kārikās makes use of the doctrine of two truths. Conceptual thought, though it remains isolated from reality, does have an internal validity or coherence and is useful in the pragmatic sense of enabling communication. Those very relational meanings which words depend on, however, provide the means by which the dependence upon conceptual fabrication can be terminated, for by turning the logic of their own dependent origination against concepts, the ultimate truth emerges: that things are neither empty nor are they not empty, i.e., that no concept whatsoever applies to reality, even that of emptiness.

Chapter III then provides an interpretive analysis of each of the 27 chapters of the Kārikās in order to show in detail the concrete application of the dialectic of dependent origination to various concepts and doctrines, both conventional and Buddhist. This is followed by an appendix containing a complete translation of the Kārikās.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AK	*Abhidharmakośa* (References are to AK volume and the page number of the translation by La Vallée Poussin.)
AN	*Añguttara Nikāya*
APP	*Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*
DN	*Dīgha Nikāya*
IHQ	*Indian Historical Quarterly*
MCB	*Mélanges Chinois et Bouddhiques*
MMK	*Mūlamadhyamakakārikās* (Cited by chapter and verse.)
MMKV	*Vṛtti* on the above. (References are to the edition by La Vallée Poussin of the MMK with the *Prasannapadā*, cited by page and line.)
MN	*Majjhima Nikāya*
MP	*Milinda Pañho*
PEW	*Philosophy East and West*
PTS	*Pāli Text Society*
PTSD	*Pāli Text Society's Pāli-English Dictionary*
RO	*Rocznik Orjentalistyczny*
SBB	*Sacred Books of the Buddhists*
SBE	*Sacred Books of the East*
Sn	*Sutta Nipāta*
SN	*Sam̃yutta Nikāya*

INTRODUCTION

On first looking into Nagarjuna's Mādhyamika Kārikās, one is struck by the extremely argumentative form in which it is cast. The work is apparently a series of rather mechanical logical refutations of a large array of both philosophical and religious positions, and it gives one the impression of being perhaps overly sophistic in its denials that any stand whatever can be validly taken on the subjects which it brings under attack. Considering, then, that the author is an eminent Buddhist, and that a majority of the topics systematically refuted are basic, indispensable Buddhist doctrines, one comes to the conclusion that the work is a unique example of nihilistic religious literature--a devout (for it constantly appeals to the teaching of the Buddha) Buddhist work whose manifest aim is to logically invalidate the entire body of Buddhist teaching, while incidentally annihilating all general philosophical positions whatsoever.

This is clearly a naive, though not entirely false, view of the Kārikās, but it is equally clear that the interpretation of Nagarjuna is today still far from decisive. Nirvana, the "Silence of the Buddha," and the doctrine of non-self (anātman) still are the subject of debate both scholarly and popular, so the radical "negativism" of the

Madhyamika school and their doctrine of emptiness (śūnyatā) remain in a constant state of interpretive flux. Is Nagarjuna a nihilist? A sceptic? A mystic? A subjective idealist? Perhaps a crypto-Vedantin? Possibly a proto-Hegelian?

One major reason for this variety of opinion is the paucity of background information which can be taken more or less for granted by students of early Buddhism--a paradox, considering the vast amount of Buddhist literature which is readily available. But this staggering aggregate of materials leaves us still quite in the dark about some of the most crucial historical problems of Buddhist studies: the relation (if any) between the original teaching of Gautama and the doctrinal elaborations of the early Community; the intellectual currents in early Buddhism which manifest themselves in the sectarian splits prior to the appearance of the Mahayana; the relation of these early "deviations" to the formation of the self-styled "Mahayana"; and finally the relation of Nagarjuna and the Madhyamikas to the Prajñāpāramitā current of early Mahayana tradition. The list could be extended, but these are sufficient to make the point clear: we as yet have no really clear idea of the intellectual milieu in which Nagarjuna's Kārikās are set.

Matters are not helped any by the unsettled state of critical opinion regarding both the biographical data on Nagarjuna and the authentic corpus of his works; in fact, so far there has been no full study of Nagarjuna based on more than one or two of the works attributed to him. Of the most significant recent works on Nagarjuna, T. R. V. Murti's[1] is based almost entirely upon the Karikas together with the seventh century commentary by Candrakirti; Venkata Ramanan's[2] is based primarily on the Chinese translation of the *Mahā-prajñāpāramitāśāstra*; and Frederick Streng's[3] is focused upon the *Kārikās* and the closely related *Vigrahavyāvartanī*. Of the several works likely to be by Nagarjuna,[4] the *Kārikās* is doubtless the most important, but a definitive treatment of Nagarjuna's works as a whole remains a desideratum of Buddhist studies.

Such a full-scale treatment, however, must come to grips with the sort of historical problems adumbrated above. The basic terminological distinction between "Hinayana" and "Mahayana" creates more confusion than clarification, since it suggests a historical dichotomy which can only too easily be overworked. This is not the place to enter into a discussion of the meaning of the "*yāna*" (vehicle) terminology, but I do suggest that it would be methodologically sounder to characterize Nagarjuna not primarily as a Mahayana Buddhist, but rather as a Buddhist of the second century A.D.,[1] who in certain contexts of his thinking could be styled a "Mahayana" Buddhist. Suffice it to say here that the Kārikās itself provides no basis for being called a "Mahayana" work: it is a "Buddhist" work, first and foremost, which contains no mention of yānas of any size, and which, as a matter of fact, refers to no Mahayana sūtras at all, though it does often allude to the "Hinayana" sūtras.[2] Without going into this problem any further, we can be fairly sure of one thing: an even approximately true view of Nagarjuna will remain a distant hope until there is a great deal more work done to clarify the precise relations between sectarian "Hinayana," early "Mahayana" (especially as expressed in the Prajñāpāramitā and related literature), and Nagarjuna.

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[1] T. R. V. Murti, *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism* (London: Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1955).

[2] K. Venkata Ramanan, *Nāgārjuna's Philosophy as Presented in the Mahā-Prajñāpāramitā-Śāstra* (Rutland, Vermont: Charles E. Tuttle, 1966).

[3] Frederick J. Streng, *Emptiness: A Study in Religious Meaning* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1967).

[4] On the writings of Nagarjuna, see Murti, *Central Philosophy*, pp. 88-91; and Ramanan, *Nāgārjuna's Philosophy*, pp. 34-37.

It is the purpose of the present study to explore some of the major issues encountered when Nagarjuna--at least the Nagarjuna of the Kārikās--is examined in the light of the basic doctrines of the early Prajñāpāramitā (Perfection of Wisdom) tradition. Whatever the precise historical relationships between the Perfection of Wisdom tradition and the Madhyamikas, it is clear that there is a fundamental congruence between the two, both in outlook and technique. Both the Perfection of Wisdom and the *Kārikās* present us with radical, paradoxical critiques of all verbal and conceptual activity, whether of a "secular" or a Buddhist nature. Both see the major concern[1] of Buddhist teaching to be the elimination of all dependence upon doctrinal viewpoints (*dṛṣṭi*) and concepts of whatever kind, "true" or "false," Buddhist or heterodox--since they see all such views and concepts to be the products of an intellect which, because of its clinging or dependency (*upādāna*), constructs (*vikalpa*) the whole realm of ideas, words, and views upon which it then depends. Thus the Fourth Aryan Truth, the Way to the cessation of suffering, involves above all the elimination of this conceptual dependency, and this necessarily includes the elimination of dependence upon *Buddhist* ideas, words, and views. In drawing out the full implications of such a conclusion, both the Perfection of Wisdom literature and the Kārikās are fundamentally paradoxical in their approach,[2] though their application of paradox differs somewhat: the *Perfection of Wisdom* bases itself largely on the premise of "no own-being" (*niḥsvabhāvatā*), while Nagarjuna stresses a corollary of the notion of no own-being--dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*).

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[1] On the most recent treatment of the biographical materials on Nagarjuna see Ramanan, Nāgārjuna's Philosophy, pp. 25-30.

[2] E.g., MMK 11.1, 13.1, 15.7, 17.2.

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[1] Thus of the six "perfections" (*pāramitās*)--giving, morality, patience, vigor, concentration, and wisdom--it is the last, *prajñā*, which gives meaning to all the others, and so it is the chief topic of the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature. See the discussions of the *pāramitās* in Har Dayal, *The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhist Sanskrit Literature* (London: Kegan Paul, 1931); in Nalinaksha Dutt, *Aspects of Mahāyāna Buddhism and Its Relation to Hinayana* (London: Luzac, 1930); and in the many studies by Edward Conze.

[2] In the literal sense of the Greek, *parádoksos*, "against the (accepted) opinion"--in Buddhist terms, "against all viewpoints."

In their paradoxicality, both the *Perfection of Wisdom* and Nagarjuna are thoroughly opposed to the intricate doctrinal elaborations and categorizations of the *abhidharma* approach, which both would regard as too involved with its own conceptual categories (*dharmas*) to allow any cessation of dependence or, hence, any cessation of suffering. This is not to say that we have a new "Buddhism of radical paradox" which rises up in opposition to the monkish scholasticism of the *abhidharma* schools. It is much more plausible to interpret the Perfection of Wisdom tradition and the Madhyamika school as reflecting a current of thought and practice which derives from earliest Buddhist times, is maintained in early sectarian "Hinayana," and appears fully articulated in the Perfection of Wisdom literature around the beginning of the Christian era. The evidence for this hypothesis of historical continuity is convincing but fragmentary, and I plan in a future study to consider the issue in detail.

For present purposes, we may assume that both the Perfection of Wisdom literature and Nagarjuna's *Kārikās* arise from this strain of self-critical, "paradoxical" Buddhism: they share the same premises and see the problem of the teaching of Buddhism in the same way (the teaching that enlightenment is not a "teaching" at all), though their respective "teaching-methods," style, and technical vocabulary differ in many ways. For instance, the *Perfection of Wisdom* is expressly a "Mahayana" *sūtra* which takes for granted the basic ideology of the "career of the bodhisattva" (*bodhicaryā*) --though it treats the bodhisattva concept in the same paradoxical fashion that all other concepts receive. On the other hand, as I suggested above, the *Kārikās* is not a self-consciously "Mahayanist" work at all, and in fact it envisions the historical possibility that there will be a time in which there are neither Buddhas nor Disciples (*śrāvakas*),[1] when the "knowledge" (*jñāna*) of enlightenment is discovered by men who attain enlightenment by themselves (*pratyekabuddhas*) without depending (!) upon any "*yāna*" whatsoever. Putting this in other terms, we can say that the "Middle Way" (*madhyamapratipad*) is also a middle way between the Hinayana and the Mahayana--even though Nagarjuna is regarded by the tradition as the discoverer of the *Perfection of Wisdom*.[2]

Be that as it may, we are interested here more in the aspects shared by the Perfection of Wisdom literature and the *Karikas*, rather than in their differences, a treatment of which would lead us far afield. For this purpose I have arbitrarily limited the Perfection of Wisdom tradition to those aspects of it developed in what is regarded as the earliest of the *Prajñāpāramitā* texts, the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* (*The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Verses*). The APP (as I shall abbreviate the title) provides us with a paradigmatic statement of the Perfection of Wisdom tradition. I do not wish to suggest that Nagarjuna makes specific use of the APP or of any other Prajnaparamita text: it may be impossible, indeed, to determine what actual knowledge of any early Mahayana literature Nagarjuna had. All we can say with some measure of confidence is that the APP (in some form) is prior to Nagarjuna[1] and represents another aspect of the "paradoxical" tradition shared by him.

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[1] Here meaning just "disciples of the Buddha," without the connotation "*Hinayana* disciples" given to the term by Mahayana propaganda.

[2] Cf. Ramanan, *Nagārjuna's Philosophy*, pp. 26f.

For this study, then, the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* is analyzed solely insofar as it sheds light on the interpretation of the *Kārikās*. The procedure will be first to examine the APP to establish the fundamental viewpoints and techniques of the Perfection of Wisdom literature, and then to study the *Kārikās* as a whole under the same thematic rubrics developed in the first Chapter. The last Chapter provides a discussion of each one of the 27 Critiques[1] of the Kārikās, in order to show the particular application of the underlying principles. For present purposes I have not entered into any discussion of post-Nagarjunian Madhyamika, or into questions of relationships between Madhyamika and later Buddhist developments. Both the translation of the Karikas and the discussions in the last Chapter are based on the edition of La Vallee Poussin[2] and on the various partial translations of that work, as the notes on each Critique indicate.

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[1] The only actual date for the existence of the APP is ca. 170 A.D. when the text was translated for the first time into Chinese by Lokakṣema or Lokarakṣa. Cf. Murti, *Central Philosophy*, p. 84. The present chronological methodology is to "allow a century or so" for a text to become established sufficiently in India for it to be carried off to another country. This is a rather weak assumption, though it has a certain vague plausibility. I see no compelling reasons not just as plausibly to place the basic APP text in the early second or late first century A.D. Until we have more information, however, all such dating is largely tendentious.

I have not entered into problems of textual criticism, though in working over the Kārikās I have developed several suspicions about individual Critiques, though no hard conclusions. For purposes of this study I have simply considered the present text of the Kārikās as it stands. I have my doubts that the work was composed by the author as a whole and in the present order; it seems more likely that the Kārikās is an arrangement, by an early commentator of individual Critiques or groups of Critiques, in order to suit the commentator's exposition. At any rate, there seems to be very little logic to the present arrangement.

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[1] Except for chapter 26, which is not a Critique at all, but simply an exposition of the twelve-fold nidāna, and seems to have no relation to the other chapters.

[2] Mūlamadhyamakakārikās (Mādhyamikasūtras) de Nāgārjuna, avec la Prasannapadā, commentaire de Candrakīrti (St. Petersburg, 1913).

CHAPTER I

PERFECTION OF WISDOM

The Purpose of the Perfection of Wisdom

In order to put the discussion of the perfection of wisdom in a proper framework, some of the basic definitions of perfect wisdom should be kept in mind from the start, although the full interpretation of these definitions requires a good deal of exposition. The most important of the definitions as they appear in the APP are the following:

> The lack of [a basis of] apprehension in all dharmas, that is called "perfect wisdom."[1]
>
> The absence of own-being in beings (*sattva*) should be known as the essence of the perfection of wisdom.[2]
>
> The isolation of the essential nature (*prakṛtiviviktatā*) of all dharmas--that is the perfection of wisdom.[3]

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[1] yo 'nupalaṁbhaḥ sarvadharmānāṁ sā prajñāpāramitetyucyate. APP p. 177. All textual citations of the APP are from Rajendralal Mitra (ed.), *Ashṭasāhasrikā*, Bibliotheca Indica No. 110 (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1888), hereafter cited simply as APP. I have often normalized Mitra's text where the errors are obvious. The translations given here are my own, based on the almost complete translation by Edward Conze, *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*, Bibliotheca Indica No. 284 (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1958). Conze refers to Mitra's pagination.

[2] sattva-asvabhāvajātikā hi prajñāpāramitā veditavyā. APP p. 175.

[3] APP p. 192.

> This perfection of wisdom is the unattached cognition (asañgajñāna) of the Tathagatas.[1]

> The essential nature (dharmatā) of dharmas is just the perfection of wisdom.[2]

A most important point which these passages bring out is the peculiar identification of objective reality with subjective perception: the nature of wisdom, or the state of enlightenment, and the nature of reality--are identical.

Putting aside for a moment the interpretation of the above definitions, we can place them in some context by considering the stated purpose of the perfection of wisdom, both in the sense of "state of enlightenment" and in the sense of the name of the text itself. We are told that "the perfection of wisdom has been set up for a great purpose: that one should not take hold (aparigraha) of form[3] nor settle down in it (anabhiniveśa)."[4] In other words, the perfection of wisdom (here in the sense either of the text or of its teaching) is an embodiment of the traditional Fourth Aryan Truth, the Way leading to the cessation of suffering through the extirpation of clinging (upādāna), here expressed as "taking hold of form." In more general terms it is said that "as aiming at ultimate reality, the perfection of wisdom has been set up for all

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[1] APP p. 274.

[2] APP p. 274.

[3] "Form," where it appears in the present translations, is an abbreviation of the inevitable series of the five skandhas: form, feeling, percept or idea, formations and consciousness.

[4] APP p. 281.

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beings for their awakening to what all dharmas truly are."[1] Here the intention is of a more gnostic sort, the perfection of wisdom providing insight into the nature of things. And, as we shall see, this insight is of itself the cessation of clinging and therefore also the cessation of suffering. The place to look for this saving gnosis is the perfection of wisdom text itself: "Where should a bodhisattva search for perfect wisdom? . . . In the exposition of the venerable Subhuti."[2]

We are told on the first page of our text that

> Whatever the Lord's disciples teach . . . all that is to be known as the Tathagata's work. For training themselves in the dharma demonstrated by the Tathagata, they realize it, they hold it in mind. Thereafter whatever they teach does not contradict the dharma. It is just an outpouring of the Tathagata's demonstration of Dharma.[3]

In brief, as the fifth definition above says, the perfection of wisdom is the essential nature of dharma, here in the specific sense of the buddhadharma, the essential teaching of the Buddha. This helps to explain the enormous amount of veneration for the text which is incorporated into the text itself--a fact which makes for a rhetoric of seemingly endless self-glorification of the text by the text.[1] The various expressions of the infinite merit accruing to the student of the perfection of wisdom is derived from one basic premise: "Just as the teacher should be abided by, held in attentive concentration (manasikāra), and honored, so should the perfection of wisdom be abided by, held in attentive concentration, and honored."[2] They should be treated, that is, as both objects of veneration and as the source of and means of attaining enlightenment.

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[1] . . . paramārtha-upasaṁhitā sarvadharmānāṁ yathābhūta-pratibodhāya pratyupasthitā sarvasattvānām. APP p. 225.

[2] APP p. 44.

[3] APP p. 4.

In the sections which follow, the fundamental doctrines of the perfection of wisdom will be discussed under three headings: first the nature of reality; second, the relationship between thought and reality; and third, the relationship between enlightenment and reality.

The Nature of Reality

The starting point, and indeed the underlying concept of the perfection of wisdom is the doctrine of "no own-being" (niḥsvabhāvatā), as definition two above states. The simplest formula-statement of the principle of no own-being is found in the words so frequent in the perfection of wisdom literature, "Form is deprived of the own-being of form,"[3] in which the term "form" can be exchanged for any dharma whatsoever. In general terms then, there is no entity which possesses its own being; no entity of itself possesses the power to exist as such an entity.[1]

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[1] Cf. the typical example of APP pp. 57ff., where the merit acquired by one who worships the APP is infinitely greater than that acquired by a worshiper of the relics of the Tathagata. There are many more examples.

[2] APP p. 171.

[3] rūpam eva virahitaṁ rūpa-svabhāvena. APP p. 10.

In a late chapter of the APP we find the treatment of own-being much more in line with Nagarjuna's own analysis, and it is quite possible that the text here is dependent on Madhyamika doctrines somewhat later in origin than the earlier parts of the APP. Nonetheless, the analysis in chapter 31, which employs the doctrine of dependent origination (*pratītya-samutpāda*), is in all essential respects in line with the dependent origination doctrine as developed in Hinayana tradition[2] and can therefore be considered part of the milieu out of which the perfection of wisdom school and the Madhyamikas grew.

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[1] The notion of *niḥsvabhāvatā* is the Mahayana amplification of the early Hinayana doctrine of non-self (*anattā/anātman*). Here is a topic which needs major treatment in order to clarify the essential historical continuities underlying the "vehicular" dichotomy, Hinayana-Mahayana. On the concept "own-being" in the *Prajñāpāramitā*, see Edward Conze, "The Ontology of the Prajñāpāramitā," PEW, III, no. 2 (July, 1953), 117-29.

[2] The basic treatments of this doctrine are still Paul Oltramare, *La formule bouddhique des douze causes* (Geneva: Georg, 1909); and Louis de la Vallée Poussin, *Bouddhisme. Études et matériaux. Théorie des douze causes* (Gand, 1913). In the present study the term "dependent origination" is not limited to its usual Hinayana denotation of the twelve-fold *nidāna*, but indicates the general concept of dependent causality, viz., "this existing, that comes to be; this not existing, that does not come to be." Cf. MN i.262.

The text here considers as analogs the music of a lute and the bodies of Tathagatas, for just as the music of the former is not derived from any particular part of the lute in and of itself--it does not *come from* any part of the lute--nor does the music *go* anywhere when the playing stops; so the "person" of a Tathagata does not come from any particular aspect of his nature (viz., one or more of the *skandhas*, or some part or combination of his physical anatomy and mental makeup), nor when he dies does his Tathagatahood go anywhere. It is rather that both the music of the lute and the person of the Tathagata "have been co-produced by a totality of many causes and conditions, but [they] do not come from anywhere. And when the totality of causes and conditions have ceased to be, then [they] do not go to anywhere . . . [and] therefore you should know, yourself, the Tathagatas and all dharmas to be neither produced nor stopped."[1] Although the idea here is familiar from the Hinayana tradition, the conclusion is unusual and quite Mahayanist in tone. That something is "neither produced nor stopped" means that because it is the result of the simultaneous co-existence of its causes--as the flame of a lamp is the result of lamp, fuel, air, and spark--it has no being (*bhāva*) of its own (*svabhāva*), and thus cannot be considered as something which *comes* into [its own] being from causes prior to it, and hence cannot, as a "self-possessed" entity, *go* anywhere once the causal conditions of its existence have been removed. The causes of a phenomenon do not produce that phenomenon as a discrete entity--as a something with its own being--and so, *ipso facto*, that discrete entity cannot cease to exist, cannot lose its own-being, for it had none to lose. The flame was not produced as a flame with its own discrete being or power to be. The music of the lute--which of course one does hear as a phenomenon--does not exist, in the sense that "it is deprived of the own-being of music," but is entirely the result of a "totality of many causes and conditions." So, finally, the Tathagata (or any person, for that matter) is not produced from the *skandhas* as an entity with his own being, nor on the other hand is he the result of something other than the *skandhas*. He is rather the result of the totality of many causes and conditions which as a nexus *are* the Tathagata, and a person considered as simply a nexus of causal factors cannot be said to "come into existence" or to "go out of existence." No dharma, therefore, is either produced or stopped.

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[1] APP p. 516.

In passing we might note that the above notion indicates the purpose of the teaching of bodhisattvas who are endowed with the perfection of wisdom: "When they have become enlightened, the bodhisattvas demonstrate dharma in order to reveal the absence of production and stopping in the essential nature of form."[1] And this is a purpose, as we saw from definition two above, which is the same as the demonstration of the absence of own-being in all dharmas.

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[1] APP p. 297.

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An important aspect of the concept of no own-being is the consideration, from a more subjective standpoint, that because nothing has own-being, nothing is possessible, as is implied by the first definition. Since nothing has its own power of being in and of itself, it offers no "substance" which might be taken hold of or possessed. It is, in terms which we shall consider below, "empty" (śūnya) of own-being, and what is void can, obviously not be possessed, used, or depended upon--nor, to carry it to the logical conclusion, can it be perceived, conceived, imagined, pointed to, or even talked about. This extreme statement is a basic statement of the fundamental doctrine of the perfection of wisdom, and as such must be examined in some detail in what follows.

Considering, then, that the Mahayana doctrine of no own-being derives from the three traditional doctrines of no permanent selfhood, dependent origination, and non-possessibility, we must now examine the elaboration of these doctrines in the APP. This elaboration can be most graphically expressed as a list of terms more or less synonymous with "no own-being." Similarly, both all beings and the perfection of wisdom are parallel in that both are "isolated," (vivikta), "unthinkable" (acintya), "indestructable" (avināśadharma), and "not undergoing the process which leads to enlightenment" (anabhisaṁbodhana).[1] Without stopping at these few terms, a fairly comprehensive list of similar attributes is arbitrarily selected below to give some idea of the virtual inexhaustibility of the negative rhetoric of the perfection of wisdom. Over and over again in the APP we are told that all dharmas are:

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[1] APP pp. 175f.

without own-being (*niḥsvabhāva*)
selfless (*anātman*)
empty (*śūnya*)
quieted (*śānta*)
like space (*ākāśavat*)
immeasurable (*aprameya*)
infinite (*ananta*)
signless (*animitta*)
not produced (*anutpanna*)
not stopped (*aniruddha*)
not created (*akṛta*)
not destroyed (*anucchinna*)
not coming (*anāgati*)
not going (*agati*)
not composite (*asaṁskṛta*)
not connected (*asaṁbandha*)
without attachment (*asaṅga*)
without fabrication (*avikalpa*)
not bound (*abaddha*)
not freed (*amukta*)
pure (*viśuddha*)
beyond the three times (*tryadhvātīta*)
not attached (*aniśrita*)
non-embracing (*aśleṣa*)
unapprehendable (*anupalabdhi*)
unseizable (*aparigṛhīta*)
unembraceable (*aśliṣṭa*)
unknowable (*ajānaka*)
imperceptible (*apaśyaka*)
without objective support (*anārambana*)
unapproachable (*anupagata*)
unapproapriable (*anupāta*)
beyond words (*avacana*)

Such a list is, of course, almost entirely unintelligible as it stands, and some further breakdown is called for. We can group the terms broadly under the three aspects of the doctrine of own-being discussed above, namely, the absence of own-being, dependent origination, and non-possessibility.

Under the first heading, *no own-being* means, as we saw, lacking in the principle of permanence and therefore being *selfless*, of which *emptiness* had been a synonym for a long time. To be empty is to be *like space*, which, since it is devoid of any character, is not subject to measurement and is therefore *immeasurable* and *infinite*. We can speak of space as limited by something else, but the nature of space is not itself limited, it has no boundaries or magnitude. Again, what is empty of its own being does not have the permanence and substantiality to leave a trace of itself behind, and is thus *signless*.

Under the second heading, what is empty of own-being because it id dependently originated is *not produced* and *not stopped*, or what amounts to the same thing, *not created* and not destroyed, *neither coming nor going* (*scil*., "into or out of existence"). What is not created is necessarily *not reproduceable*, and if it is not created by anything, then it is *not composed* of anything. To be uncomposed of anything means that something is *unconnected* to anything else, and the most common synonym for this in the APP is "*isolated*." We have at this point, oddly enough, come to what seems the precise opposite of the general doctrine of dependent origination, namely, that all things are totally dependent upon the formative causal conditions for their "existence" and are therefore empty of self or own-being. However, if we consider such a dependently-originated entity from a slightly different standpoint, we can see the sense of the apparently contradictory doctrine. In the example of the music of the lute, the music is entirely dependent upon the various causal conditions which produced it--wood, strings, its assembly, the player, etc.--and in itself has no power to exist, no own-being or selfhood. But as we saw above, a mere nexus of causal conditions cannot be considered an entity, and only an entity can be said to come into existence or go out of it, be produced and stopped, or be created and destroyed. The music of the lute is therefore unproduced, and cannot be treated as an existent entity which *exists* dependent on its causal conditions, or which *exists* in relation to them all. The music which we listen to is from one standpoint entirely dependently originated, and from another standpoint it is absolutely *isolated* from those causal conditions. We can consider Milinda's chariot in the same light. Since there is ultimately no "chariot" which has real existence distinct from the ordered arrangement of its component parts, it makes perfectly good sense to say that the chariot is not composed of anything, is not connected or related to anything, and is thus isolated from everything, including the parts which dependently originate that "chariot" upon which Milinda rides. Once we have made some sense of the notion of isolation, several other implicated concepts follow. What is isolated from everything is necessarily not affected or disturbed by anything, and is therefore *pure* and quieted. Being unrelated, it is *beyond the three times*. And, as we have just seen, being unrelated it is not dependent, not attached to anything. On the other hand, from a subjective standpoint, it does not relate itself to anything: it is *non-embracing* and *without objective support*.

Under the third heading, what is empty of own-being is *unapprehendable* by nature, *unapproachable*, *unembraceable*; and from a specifically epistemological standpoint *unknowable*, *imperceptible*, and *beyond words*. These terms must also be understood in the light of the concept of isolation. We do hear the dependently originated music played by the lutist, but that music in itself is not an entity (*bhāva*) because it has no being of its own (*niḥsvabhāvatvāt*), and therefore is not an entity which, strictly speaking, can be "known" or "perceived" or even be talked about. The music is thus isolated from consciousness and words as well as from its originating conditions. In Chapter II it will be shown that Nagarjuna makes particular use of this aspect of isolation by demonstrating the inapplicability of all concepts to reality.

The linking together of the terms above is intended to be nothing more than a suggestion of their interpretation. These terms are the rhetorical building-blocks of the perfection of wisdom literature rather than the terminology of a philosophical system. Their employment is as much connotative as denotative, although this does not mean that they are merely philosophical poetry. Metaphor abounds here as it does in all Buddhist literature, but underlying the metaphors

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and the paradoxes is a consistent philosophical standpoint which it is hoped this discussion will help to clarify.

Let us examine some of the aspects of this terminology which are most characteristic of the perfection of wisdom literature, especially as we have it in the APP. First, we see an emphasis upon the immeasurability of all dharmas, a consequence of the fact that as things have no own-being they therefore lack the limitations inherent to it; that is, no thing "has" a beginning or end in time since it was not produced or destroyed, and is therefore unlimited by time. Similarly, no thing "has" a spatial boundary, since no entity "is" there to have one, nor does it "have" any of the qualities and limitations ascribed to it by common sense or implied by its easily ascertainable causal conditions:

> Perfect wisdom is an infinite perfection because beings are infinite . . . because one cannot apprehend the beginning, middle, or end of all dharmas . . . [and] because all dharmas are endless and boundless, and their beginning, middle, and end are not apprehended. For one cannot apprehend the beginning, middle, and end of form.[1]
>
> [All dharmas] are immeasurable, because one cannot conceive of a measure of form, . . . since such a measure does not exist . . . because of the unlimitedness of all dharmas.[2]

We shall not dwell on the concept of immeasurableness and its synonymous terms, for although it is very characteristic of the language of the APP, it plays little part in the more restrained approach of Nagarjuna's Kārikās. Naturally, however, this type of language influences our understanding of other notions, for instance that of signlessness (*animittatā*) and lack of objective support (*anārambanatā*): "The true nature (*dharmatā*) of dharmas is neither past, nor future, nor present; it lies quite outside the three periods of time . . . and for that reason . . . cannot be treated as a sign or as an objective support."[1] From a more analytical standpoint, the fact of signlessness and lack of objective support follows naturally from the absence of own-being in all things, as we saw above. In the preceding quotation, however, the approach is more in line with the rhetoric of infinitude and immeasureableness than with the logical implications of the no own-being doctrine.

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[1] APP p. 46.

[2] APP p. 279.

Perhaps the most puzzling terminology of the APP is the group of terms related to isolation (unconditioned, not connected, pure, non-embracing, etc.).

> The isolation of the essential nature of all dharmas --that is the perfection of wisdom. For the Tathagata has fully known all dharmas as not made (*akṛta*). . . . By nature those dharmas are not a something (*na kiñcit*). Their nature is no-nature, and their no-nature is their nature, because of the single "characteristicness" (*ekalakṣaṇatvāt*) of all dharmas, namely, their non-characteristicness.[2]

The implication of the first sentence above will be treated further below. For our purposes here, however, we note that in this passage isolatedness is linked directly to the concept of non-production (all dharmas are not made) and to the concept of emptiness of own-being (dharmas are not a something), two concepts which are closely related to each other: "The fact that all dharmas are without own-being is the same as the fact that they are not a production (*anabhinirvṛtti*)."[1]

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[1] APP p. 191.

[2] APP p. 192.

As we saw earlier, what is devoid of its own being and has not, therefore, been "created" or produced, cannot be considered as an entity which "is" related to or connected to anything else at all, and is thus isolated. Characteristic of all the perfection of wisdom literature, particularly the *Vajracchedikā*, is the concluding formula in the first passage above: "Their nature is no-nature, and their no-nature is their nature." Since all dharmas are not made (*a-kṛta*), we can say, with a slight play on words, that their essential nature (*pra-kṛti*) is that they "have" no nature (*a-prakṛti*)--where "nature" (*prakṛti*) is understood by the reader in the sense of "made" (*prakṛta*). The play on words is not necessary, however, for we can say in other terms that the real "being" (or nature, *svabhāva*) of any being (*bhāva*) can only be its lack of being (*niḥsvabhāvatā*).

From another point of view, because all things are empty of own-being, because they are impermanent, they are unapprehendable and unpossessible, and being thus are indeed isolated from (*vivikta*--literally, "separated from")[2] the apprehender or possessor as well as from everything else. Although a phenomenon *appears* to us--the music of the lute, for instance, or a functioning chariot--and is present to consciousness, yet because it lacks own-being it is unapprehendable and unpossessible by nature. It appears, having originated dependently (*pratītyasamutpanna*), but at the same time, from an absolute standpoint (*paramārthatas*),[1] is not "produced" as an existing entity. We can say, therefore, that all dharmas are both *empty of own-being*, since they are dependently originated and impermanent, and *isolated in their suchness*,[2] since they appear but do not come from anywhere nor do they go anywhere.

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[1] APP p. 26.

[2] It should be noted that the terms *viveka* and *śānta* are borrowed from the vocabulary of meditative practice (where they mean "solitude" and "calmed") and are now applied

Once we have established the correlation between emptiness and isolation, the entire list of attributes of the nature of dharmas (*dharmatā*) can be seen in terms of isolation. Things which are isolated are pure, because unaffected by impurity, and quieted, because unaffected by disturbances. Again, what is isolated from all relationships is not subject to measure or comparison, and so is unlimited, immeasurable, infinite, beyond the three times, and so forth. For the same reason it is unapprehendable, unknowable, beyond words, and

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to the nature of external reality as well. See section below on the relationship between enlightenment and reality. On *viveka* and *vivikta* in Hinayana context, see DN i.71; Sn 822, 851, 915.

[1] See Chapter II, passim, for discussion of the "two truths" doctrine as developed in the Madhyamika school.

[2] On the term "suchness" (*tathatā*), see below.

the like--all the characteristics which can be summed up in one, "unembraceable." Most significantly, the general unembraceability of things is related to the fact that they are non-embracing by nature: "All dharmas are indeed unknowable and imperceptible (lit., have no knowers and no seers) . . . for all dharmas are empty and are unattached (*aniśrita*)."[1] A phenomenon, in other words, because it is empty of own-being, does not exist as an entity related to, dependent on, attached to, or connected in any way to its causal conditions or to anything else. And thus isolated from relation and comparison, it cannot be possessed, known, or named. Not being connected to anything else, it does not connect itself to other things; just as the music of the lute is unconnected to the strings of the instrument, so the strings have not connected themselves to, do not embrace, adhere to or depend upon the music: "The non-embracing (*aśleṣa*) of form is the non-connection (*asaṁbandha*) of form, . . . the non-production and non-stopping of form."[2]

Closely related to the concept of non-connection is that of non-reproduction, since what did not occur in the past cannot re-occur or "be" similar in the future. When the gods praise the perfection of wisdom teachings as the "second turning of the wheel of dharma in Jambudvipa," they are scolded with the observation that not only is there nothing being taught, but that no one could possibly turn the wheel a second time:

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[1] APP p. 275.

[2] APP p. 294.

> No dharma is apprehended, no dharma is here indicated, no dharma will move on any dharma, . . . because all dharmas are absolutely unproduced (*anabhinirvrtta*) [and hence will not be done anew in the future], nor will any dharma turn back any dharma, . . . because from the beginning all dharmas have not been produced [and hence will not impede anything's being done], since their essential nature is isolated.[1]

In passing, we note one other synonym of emptiness and isolation, and that is suchness (*tathatā*), a term which is rather vague in the APP and which would need a much fuller analysis than is here possible. In late Hinayana sources[2] suchness seems to be that abstract quality which characterizes a state of affairs as being indeed such as it is, and is thus close in meaning to "the truth" about something, the way something really is. Defined in this fashion, we can see something of the meaning of the term as it is used in Mahayana contexts. We already know that "the way things are" is described by the negative terms, "empty of own-being," "isolated," "impermanent," "unconditioned," and so on. A new slant, however, is afforded by the positive term, "suchness," which indicates simply the way things are or "the real nature of a dharma," yet at the same time it leaves that "real nature" indeterminate and uncharacterized, and so remains consistent with the fact that all things are beyond words, descriptions, or comparisons:

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[1] APP p. 204.

[2] Buddhaghosa, *The Path of Purification*, trans. Bhikkhu Ñānamoḷi (Colombo: Semage, 1956), p. 593.

> The suchness of the Tathagata and the suchness of all dharmas are both one single suchness, not two, not divided, a non-dual suchness. Suchness is nowhere, suchness is from nowhere, suchness belongs to nothing. It is because it is a suchness which belongs to nothing that it is not two, not divided, a non-dual suchness.[1]

The language here can be misleading, but the basic meaning is perhaps not too hard to get at. All dharmas share the fact of their lack of own-being, emptiness, unapprehendability, and so forth, and this itself is the only "way that things are," insofar as they can be spoken about at all. As the one suchness it is non-dual, since there is no other way for things to be than isolated. Furthermore, since all dharmas are isolated and therefore unrelated to measurement or comparison in space and time, and therefore not subject to any comparison as being "other" relative to any other dharma, each dharma in its suchness is non-dual (that is, there is nothing which can "be" other to it) and unrelated to temporal and spatial determinants: it "is nowhere, is from nowhere, and belongs to nothing," and thus is not divisible in any sense. From these considerations it can further be seen that "one (scil., "a bodhisattva") who goes about thus [according to suchness] . . . goes about nowhere at all. For [any ideas as to] his own performance neither proceed in him nor befall him,"[2] a statement which will become clearer after the discussion on teaching the perfection of wisdom, towards the end of this chapter.

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[1] APP p. 307.

[2] APP p. 355.

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One final aspect of the doctrine of isolation will lead us into the next topic for consideration, the relationship between thought and reality, and that is the fact that, from an epistemological standpoint, isolation means the isolation of all things from thought and words: "All dharmas cannot be talked about (anabhilāpya), for one cannot talk about the emptiness of all dharmas in words . . . [and] there is no growth or diminution of an entity which cannot be talked about."[1] The implications here are most important. Something which is beyond words (avacana) is, more generally, beyond thought (acintya). And certainly its emptiness and isolation cannot be conceived if the thing itself cannot be. The emptiness discussed above in the perfection of wisdom texts is, after all, a concept; the idea of "the isolation of the music of the lute" is not the same thing as the actual isolation of the music (i.e., the suchness of the music)--the music is indeed isolated from the concept we have about its isolatedness. We seem to be left with "emptiness" and "isolation" as mere words, unconnected to things "the way they are." Our passage further suggests our problem when it states that "there is no growth or diminution of an entity which cannot be talked about," for the notions of growth and diminution would demand comparisons in time between moments in the existence of something which had no existence at any moment. "Growth" and "diminution" are mere conceptual constructions applied to a reality which, because it lacks own-being, is by nature unthinkable, and thus all of the categories applied to that reality by thought are simply the creations of thought, and, from the ultimate standpoint, essentially unrelated and unconnected to that reality.

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[1] APP p. 348.

The Relationship Between Thought and Reality

At this point we are involved in a subject which to be adequate treated would require a detailed discussion of Buddhist logic as developed in the school of Dignaga from the fifth century on. The germ of this later epistemological and logical theorizing is already clearly apparent, however, in the perfection of wisdom literature and is the basis for the doctrine of two truths as we find it in Nagarjuna's *Kārikās*.

On the one hand, the APP takes for granted what we can call, after Stcherbatsky, the realist standpoint of early Hinayana Buddhism. For example: "A deed can arise only with an objective support (*sārambana*), not without one. A thought can arise only with an objective support, not without one. Intellectual acts proceed according to dharmas which are seen, heard, supposed, or cognized (*dṛṣṭaśrutamatavijñāta*)."[1] Here the point of view is quite in line with the traditional doctrine of "objective support" for the senses, as developed in the Theravadin *Sutta Piṭaka* and *Abhidhamma Piṭaka*, and in the Sarvastivadin *abhidharma*.[2]

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[1] APP p. 358.

[2] Cf. PTSD s.v. *ārammana*; AK s.v. *ālambana*.

At the same time, however, from the higher standpoint (*paramārthatas*) each of the dharmas or categories mentioned in the above passage are isolated and without objective support, as the same passage goes on to state: "One treats a non-existent objective support as a sign, as an objective support. The act of volition is isolated, and also the sign, and it arises only based upon the conventional expressions of the world (*lokavyavahāra*)."[1] If then all of those dharmas which are seen, heard, supposed, or cognized, as well as the acts of consciousness which they elicit and the deeds which they motivate--if all are isolated, we can ask what is the origin of the "conventional expressions of the world" which provide the relational, common-sense view of the first part of the above passage. The answer to this is clear, although we are not provided with the detailed analysis of the process which is attempted by later Buddhist Logic.[2]

Conventional expressions, that is, words and the conceptual relationships which give them meaning, arise from the unenlightened consciousness which is that in general "of the world": "Dharmas do not exist in such a way as foolish, untaught common people (*bālapṛthagjanā aśrutavantaḥ*) suppose. . . . How then do they exist? As they do not exist, so they exist, and so, since they do not exist, the are called [the result of] ignorance."[1] Although this involves a play on words, we can see the underlying notion: all dharmas are isolated, they are "not found" (*na vidyante*) as entities with own-being which are apprehendable by consciousness. And what *is* "found" (or "known," *vidyate*) by the foolisn, untaught common people refers to what is indeed incapable of being found or known (*a-vidyā*), and so is simply a fabrication (*vikalpa*) by the mind. This concept of fabrication (and its related terms, *saṁkalpa*, *parikalpa*, *kalpanā*) as used in the APP and by Nagarjuna, can be understood in general terms as "relational conceptualization," a meaning which derives easily enough from its use in the APP texts:

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[1] APP p. 358, rather freely.

[2] Cf. Theodore Stcherbatsky, *Buddhist Logic* (2 vols.; 's-Gravenhage: Mouton, 1958), vol. I, pp. 204ff.

> Although [dharmas] are not found/known, those [foolish people] have fabricated (*kalpita*) all the dharmas which are not there (or "known," *avidyamāna*). Having constructed them, they are attached to the two extremes. They do not know nor see those dharmas. Therefore they fabricate those dharmas which are not there/known. Having constructed them, they adhere to the two extremes. Having adhered, depending for that reason on a [basis of] apprehension (*upalaṁbhaṁ niśritya*) they fabricate past dharmas, future dharmas, present dharmas. Having fabricated them, they are attached to name and form.[2]

This attachment (*abhiniveśa*) to name and form consists essentially in the holding on to the "great views" (*mahatī dṛṣṭi*) of self, being (*sattva*), living soul (*jīva*), person (*pudgala*), continued existence (*bhava*), destruction (*vibhava*), annihilation (*uccheda*), eternality (*śāśvata*), individuality (*svakāya*), etc.,[3] or in more general terms, positive and negative statements, names, or ideas about things. The process of fabricating and adhering is the process of becoming defiled (*saṁkliṣṭa*), and defilement occurs "to the extent that beings take hold of things and adhere to them."[1] But taking hold of things means to apprehend and make un-isolated what is by nature isolated and unapprehendable; and as "purity" is a synonym of "isolated," it means further to create impurity and defilement where there is only the pure and quieted. In reality, of course, there is no such thing as the "un-isolated" and "impure"; defilement is not possible, ultimately--it is sheer illusion. Furthermore, even if there were such a thing as defilement, it could not affect what is essentially isolated.

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[1] APP p. 15.

[2] APP p. 15.

[3] APP p. 19.

The state of unenlightenment or ignorance, then, is the mental fabrication of a fictive opposite to perfect wisdom, the state of enlightenment. Looking back to our list of definitions of perfect wisdom in the preceding section, we can now invent a set of anti-definitions which would provide the premises of the state of ignorant fabricating:

> The fact of a basis of apprehension in all dharmas, that is called "fabrication" (*vikalpa*).
>
> The presence of own-being in beings should be known as the essence of fabricating.
>
> The connectedness (or interrelationality) of the essential nature of all dharmas--that is fabrication.

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[1] yathā sattvānām udgraho 'bhiniveśas tathā sañkleśaḥ. . . . APP p. 400.

> This fabricating is the attached cognition of the ignorant.
>
> The essential nature of ignorance is just constructing.[1]

In this light, the perfection of wisdom texts seem to be dedicated to the single aim of refuting these premises of ordinary consciousness, including ordinary Buddhist consciousness.

> Unthinkable are Tathagatahood, Buddhahood, self-existence (*svayambhūtva*), and the state of all-knowledge (*sarvajñatva*), for on these one cannot reflect with one's thought, since with regard to these develops no thought, volition, or mental dharmas, or comparing (*tulanā*).[2]

Here as throughout, what is being refuted is the assumption by "attached cognition," the fabricating mind, that what it conceives reality to be, what it thinks and verbalizes about reality, *is* reality, rather than the creation of the clinging consciousness.

We can perhaps put the matter this way. We experience a world of lute-music, chariots, Buddhas, and ignorant men, each of which has its "suchness." The ordinary consciousness, in attempting to take hold of the world, sees permanence (equivalent to selfhood or own-being) where there is only impermanence (emptiness), and "meaningful," i.e., conceptual, interrelationships where there is only the isolation of things which come from nowhere and go nowhere. The former of these two creative activities is familiar enough from earlier Hinayana tradition, but the latter, the fabrication of conceptual interrelationships, is the main object of attack in the perfection of wisdom tradition, which traces out the full implications of the doctrine of the "unthinkable" and "unspeakable" nature of reality, and in the process, apparently, makes nonsense out of traditional Buddhist doctrine. For it is quite easy to step from the doctrine of views (*dṛṣṭi*) as a mode of clinging to the realization that the doctrines of Buddhism itself are not in essence different from other views --they share the same verbal and conceptual makeup and are therefore subject to the same criticism. Thus, from the ultimate standpoint, Buddhist language as well as the language of logic and common sense can only apply to "conventional" (*vyāvahārika*, "practical") reality, the world as conceived by a fabricating consciousness. The world as it really is; that is, in its suchness, remains essentially separate, isolated, from all concepts, Buddhist or non-Buddhist:

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[1] It should be kept in mind that what is fabricated by the "attached cognition of the ignorant" is not the illusion of a manifold external world, but rather the illusion that the world which is ultimately empty of own-being, isolated, unconditioned, unconnected, etc., is really a world which *has* own-being, *is* apprehendable, *is* conditioned, *is* interrelated, etc.

[2] APP p. 278.

> "Being" is not the name of a dharma or of a non-dharma. This added-on (*prakṣipta*) word is adventitious; this added-on word is insubstantial; this added-on word is nothing in itself; this added-on word is unsupported--"being, being." Has thereby anything been shown up? If a Tathagata, with the sound of his voice of infinite range, his deep voice, should pronounce, even for aeons countless as the sands of the Ganges, the word "being," would thereby any dharma have been produced, will one be produced,

> is one being produced? . . . No, because a being is pure from the beginning, perfectly pure.[1]

Or, to put it more simply, words and concepts are by nature isolated from that external reality to which they are supposed to refer. This statement, together with the proposition that the source of basic unhappiness is the attempt by the mind to "grasp" that external reality, to adhere to it by means of conceptual fabrications--these two considerations make up the essential content of the doctrine of the APP.

One more paradox of utmost importance appears at this point. We know that thought is isolated from objective reality; on the other hand we are told that "the isolation of the essential nature of all dharmas is the perfection of wisdom." Stated otherwise, the unattached (isolated) cognition of the unattached (isolated) nature of all dharmas, and the unattached *nature* of all dharmas, are the same thing--the essential nature of enlightenment and the essential nature of all things is the same. We shall return to this puzzling conclusion below, but it grows out of what we have already discussed:

> This perfection of wisdom cannot be expounded, nor learned, nor distinguished, nor considered, nor ascertained, nor reflected upon by means of the *skandhas*, *dhātus*, or *āyatanas* . . . because all dharmas are isolated, absolutely isolated. Nor can the perfection of wisdom be understood otherwise than by the skandhas, etc., for just the very skandhas, etc., are empty, isolated, quieted. It is thus that the perfection of wisdom and the *skandhas*, etc., are not two, nor divisible.[2]

The sense of this passage, as I see it, is this: perfect wisdom, like any other thing, is isolated by nature and therefore cannot be apprehended, in any sense, by words or concepts. Words and concepts are made possible because of the dharmas of materiality (rūpa), sense perception, and consciousness (the other *skandhas*, *āyatanas*, or *dhātus*). Now all of these dharmas are empty of own-being, isolated. But we know that perfect wisdom is identical with the isolatedness of the essential nature of all dharmas. Thus, although perfect wisdom cannot be understood by means of the *skandhas* through thought or perception, nonetheless it is the nature of the *skandhas* themselves which *is* the state of enlightenment or perfect wisdom. More precisely, it is the wordless, concept-free nature of all dharmas which is the same as enlightenment: "When there is no idea (*saṁjñā*), appellation (*samajñā*), designation (*prajñapti*), or conventional expression (*vyavahāra*), then one speaks of perfect wisdom."[1] It follows that, strictly speaking, the use of language and thought in studying or meditating upon perfect wisdom contradicts the very nature of perfect wisdom. We are reminded of this rather frequently by the text:

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[1] APP p. 47.

[2] APP p. 177.

> "Buddha," "bodhisattva," "perfect wisdom," all these are mere words (*nāmadheyamātra*). And that [to which the word is to be] applied is unproduced; [this is just] like [the way in which the word] "self" is said. And the fact that all dharmas are without own-being is the same as the fact that they are uncreated (*anabhinirvṛtti*).[2]

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[1] APP p. 177.

[2] APP p. 25f.

> These which are expounded by the Tathagata are [simply] words spoken (*abhilāpā abhilapitā*): "immeasurable," or "incalculable," or "indestructable," or "empty," or "signless," or "wishless," or "uneffected" (*anabhisaṁskāra*), or "non-production," or "no birth," or "non-being," or "dispassion," or "cessation," or "nirvana."[1]

Conceptual thought, in other words, refers only to itself; it does not "connect" us with external *or* internal reality. Moreover, conceptual thought is, as we saw above, based on the premises of own-being, permanence, relatedness, apprehendability--premises which are purely and creation of thought as it attempts to cling to reality. In this light, conceptual understanding is the major obstacle to the attainment of enlightenment. In the ultimate sense, "true" or "correct" understanding of the doctrines of Buddhism is not only irrelevant to the attainment of enlightenment, it actually is an obstacle to enlightenment:

> [One] goes about in a sign (*nimitte*) when he goes about in [the ideas] "form, etc.," or "form is a sign," or "production of form," or "stopping of form," or "destruction of form," or "form is empty," or "I go about," or "I am a bodhisattva." For he actually goes about in [the idea] "I am a bodhisattva" as a basis (*upalaṁbha*).[2]

Indeed, it must not be forgotten that "nothing real is meant by the word 'bodhisattva,' . . . because a bodhisattva trains himself in non-attachment to all dharmas."[3] To dwell on or even have in mind the concept "bodhisattva" is to be supported by and attached to a fictive, mental "sign." It is only in the absence of all such signs, in the relinquishment of all conceptual supports and attachments, that the state of unsupported and unattached enlightenment is possible.

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[1] APP p. 347. [2] APP p. 11.

[3] APP p. 18, following Conze.

In the ultimate sense I cannot actually be supported by (depend on) any dharma, just as perception is not actually supported by an objective sign of a dharma, and as thought is not actually supported by the idea of a dharma--since this would contradict the isolated nature of both perfect wisdom and the world. To base one's meditation on the concept, for example, that "form is empty of own-being," is, after all, to be doubly deluded; for this is to be both attached to an idea and to assume that one *can* be attached to an idea, that the idea, as a mental fabrication, *is* something which one can "hold on to" or have one's meditational practice really based upon. We have therefore to correct the earlier statement that "conceptual thought . . . refers only to itself." For since thought itself is isolated, I cannot use it or depend on it to constitute my understanding or to contribute to my enlightenment.

In conclusion, therefore, enlightenment is obstructed both by the presence of concepts, whether they are "true" or "false," and by my attempt to use concepts as a means of "getting" enlightenment, since both the ideas themselves and my "making use" of them contradict the nature of enlightenment. This of course raises some difficulty in the teaching of the perfection of wisdom, as we shall see.

The Relationship Between Enlightenment and Reality

At the beginning of this chapter, I mentioned that the relationship between enlightenment and reality is conceived of as an identity. Thus, in the third and fourth definitions given, the perfection of wisdom is seen to be both "the unattached cognition of the Tathagatas" and "the isolation of the essential nature of all dharmas." This essential identity is brought out time and time again in the APP:

> The perfection of wisdom is without own-being because beings are without own-being; . . . isolated because beings are isolated; . . . unthinkable because beings are unthinkable; . . . of an indestructable nature because beings are of an indestructable nature. . . .[1]

The meaning here is fairly clear, at least in the sense that the nature of one's awareness of reality must itself be in accord with the nature of reality:

> The non-embracing of form, etc., is the non-connection of form . . . the non-production and non-stopping of form. One thus becomes non-embracing as a result of the cognition and vision that "all dharmas are non-embracing, non-connected.[2]

Put simply, the non-embracing nature of all things is identical with the (psychological) state of not embracing--enlightenment. The implication is clear: my consciousness is by nature always already enlightened--I need not "attain" enlightenment, since the true state of my consciousness, by virtue of its unalterable non-embracing nature, is enlightenment.[3]

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[1] APP pp. 175f.

[2] APP pp. 294f.

[3] This concept plays a primary role in Chinese Ch'an tradition. Cf. the statement in the Platform Sutra:

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Once this principle is established, the APP provides us with an extensive list of further implications of the identity of enlightenment and the nature of reality. We are told that perfect wisdom is:

> inexpressible, because all dharmas are without fabrication;
> nameless, because all skandhas are not apprehended;
> without genesis, because no dharma has come about;
> not productive [of anything], because all dharmas are without self;
> not a discipline, because past, future, and present are not apprehended as [real] things;
> quieted, because no sign is apprehended in all dharmas;
> uncombined, because all dharmas are non-combining;
> impermanent, because all dharmas are un-composite;
> characterless, because there is no [re-]production of dharmas. . . .[1]

This list, which I present only partially, seems quite unsystematic, and we need not dwell on it in detail. In essence, such a list of correlations demonstrates the principle that whatever terms are used to describe the nature of reality, they are also descriptive of the state of enlightenment itself. This principle prevents us from identifying perfect wisdom, or enlightenment, with any particular information, concept, mental state, or emotional state; for instance: "[The bodhisattva] is neither impassioned nor dispassionate; for form, etc., in their true reality, in their own-being, do not become either impassioned nor dispassionate."[2]

"Not-attachment is man's original nature" (无住者為人本性) where the idea is expressed in an amalgam of Taoist and Buddhist terminology. Wing-tsit Chan, The Platform Scripture (New York: St. John's University Press, 1963), p. 51.

[1] APP pp. 205f.

[2] APP p. 476.

In the light of the above considerations, it becomes legitimate to speak of all dharmas as being enlightened by nature--the ultimate nature of reality is enlightenment. Taking this further, we can say that human enlightenment is the cognitive aspect of universal enlightenment which all things have as their ultimate nature. The oddity of such a conclusion is lessened if the definitions of perfect wisdom are recalled, and if it is kept in mind that perfect wisdom has no particular, positive intellectual or emotional content, but is simply the state of not being attached (or rather that state of awareness which is unattachedness).

In a similar vein are such statements as the following: "Suchness (or simply, "the nature of things") is everywhere the same, since all dharmas [have already] attained nirvana."[1] Here we must recall that nirvana is--or follows from--the cessation of clinging; it is the cessation of attachment. Implicit in the passage above is the doctrine expressed in Kārikās 25.19: "There is no distinguishing whatsoever of samsara from nirvana; there is no distinguishing whatsoever of nirvana from samsara." For just as perfect wisdom is not a state utterly beyond the skandhas, so nirvana cannot be a state "outside of" the samsaric world; just as the state of enlightenment is identical with the nature of all dharmas, so nirvana is identical with samsara.

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[1] sarvadharmāṇāṁ nirvāṇaprāptitas tathatā-samatayā (prajñāpāramitā 'nugantavyā). APP p. 476

Śāsana: The Teaching of Enlightenment

Growing out of the basic epistemological doctrines of perfect wisdom are what we might call the two paradoxes of teaching: first, that perfect wisdom cannot be taught and has never been taught, and second, that it cannot be learned or attained and has never been attained by anyone.

> There is nothing to understand [in Subhuti's teaching of the perfection of wisdom], there is nothing to understand. For nothing is indicated in it, nothing is learned from it.[1]
>
> There will be no receivers of this perfect wisdom as here explained, for no dharma at all has been indicated, lit up, or communicated. So there will be none who can receive it.[2]

In our quest for perfect wisdom we are told that we should search for it "in the exposition of the venerable Subhuti," for that exposition is the Dharma of the Buddha--"an outpouring of the Tathagata's demonstration of Dharma." We discover now that nothing at all has been demonstrated, nothing has been taught about perfect wisdom, nor will anyone ever attain the perfect wisdom discussed in the APP. As Nagarjuna says, "[The Dharma which is] . . . the benign stilling of verbal expression (prapañca-upaśama)--no [such] Dharma was taught by the Buddha to anyone anywhere."[3]

All of this follows from the nature of perfect wisdom, the "unattached cognition" of unattached dharmas; it is the ultimate non-relatedness of all beings and dharmas. The state of non-relation cannot be an idea, since ideas are based upon relation. Thus any teaching about the state of non-relation is about "nothing," and of course there is nothing of that state which can be "understood."

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[1] APP p. 17. [2] APP pp. 40f. [3] MMK 25.24.

> Deep, O Lord, is perfect wisdom. It cannot be developed (bhāvana) by anything, no one has developed it, no one is developing it, no one will develop it, nor is there anything to be developed, nor [will it] anywhere be developed. For in perfect wisdom nothing at all has been brought to perfection. The development of perfect wisdom is the development of space, of all dharmas, of non-attachment, of the infinite, of what is not, of not-taking-hold.[1]

The last sentence in this passage shows us the crux of the matter, for relative to what can the state of non-relation be produced? Out of what could it be made, and how can there be any making of what does not exist? Perfect wisdom is the state of not-taking-hold, and the only logical thing to be said about the development of such a state is that it can be brought about by--not-taking-hold. Nothing can be done to attain the state of not-doing, except ceasing to do. Nothing can be thought on to attain the state of no thought (acitta), except ceasing to conceptualize. Therefore any mental effort expended in trying to "come to an understanding of" or "attain insight into" perfect wisdom, is absolutely futile. Any attempt to understand the perfection of wisdom teachings is antithetical to the perfection of wisdom, for both the attempt and the understanding are directed towards mere words. The only thing which leads to the cessation of clinging is the cessation of clinging, and this is the final statement of the Fourth Aryan Truth.

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[1] APP p. 301.

From a slightly different standpoint we can put the matter this way: just as thought, being isolated, cannot actually be directed towards objects, also isolated, so teaching cannot actually be directed towards or received by a pupil. What I as a pupil "learn" when I listen to the perfection of wisdom teachings is simply my conceptual fabrication about Subhuti's own conceptual fabrications about the inconceivable perfection of wisdom--or, more succinctly, talk about talk about the unspeakable.

Nevertheless, we still have to resort to Subhuti's teaching as our means of "learning" the perfection of wisdom. The paradox can only be resolved when the teaching is considered not the end, which is enlightenment, but only as a means (upāya) to the end. As a means, the teaching, as well as all of the separate doctrines which make it up--Buddha, bodhisattva, emptiness, dharma, isolation, etc.--all of this is prajñapti, metaphorical designation, or, more literally, "that which causes one to know," or "an indication." A colorful example of this would be the game of charades, in which physical gestures and actions serve to make known or indicate words or phrases. The major difference in the APP is that prajñapti does not make known or indicate anything, strictly speaking. Indeed, since enlightenment is something all beings "have," since everyone has already attained nirvana, the only function of the teaching, made up of pure prajnapti, is to indicate the delusion of ignorance, the web of conceptual fabrications produced by clinging thought. The goal of the teaching is the cessation of that clinging to words and concepts, but since the medium of instruction is thought--words and concepts--the method of instruction will have to consist of techniques designed to make impossible any reliance upon language and thought whatsoever. These techniques, as we have seen, are paradox, contradiction, and illogic. The latter two, however, are only stylistic techniques--logical consistency is an essential ingredient of the text's approach --and it is perhaps more accurate to say that paradox is the fundamental technique: perfect wisdom is that which is essentially "contrary to opinion." At the same time, however, we cannot say that perfect wisdom is "beyond reason" or irrational, for it is not something which is beyond anything or opposite to anything--form is emptiness, samsara is nirvana.

> Where should a bodhisattva search for perfect wisdom? . . . He should not search for it in form [nor in any other skandha] nor in that which is other than form [or any other skandha]. Because perfect wisdom is not form, nor yet other than form.[1]

The successful application of the techniques of paradox must take the normal reliance upon language and thought and turn it to frustration, despair, and terror. The ignorant man is convinced that the only way to reach the top of the tower is to climb the ladder of Dharma (and Abhidharma, and

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[1] APP p. 44.

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the Abhi-abhidharma which is the Perfection of Wisdom) rung by rung. He does not see, however, that actually the ladder is circular and that his climbing simply leads him around back to where he started. In order to help him overcome his mistake, the Master Climber (the Buddha) points out that it is his dependence upon the ladder which bends it into an endless circle--a most frustrating discovery for the man--and second, that the ladder itself is, after all, a figment of the climber's imagination, and that actually he has been stepping on non-existent, mentally fabricated rungs--a terrifying realization, as though the ladder had suddenly been pulled out from under the man now miles above the ground. Yet it is only at this point that the man can realize that he already is standing on the top of the tower, and had been standing there all along, for he stands nowhere, or on emptiness. To realize this is to abandon the futile dependence upon the ladder and to forget the frustration and terror of losing the ladder. Only the climber (the bodhisattva) who is strong enough to face the truth about ladders (the Dharma) without incurring a nervous breakdown--only such a one is ready for the teaching of the Perfection of Wisdom:

> If, when this [paradox about the nature of enlightenment and reality] is pointed out, a bodhisattva's mind does not become . . . terrified, it is just this bodhisattva, this great being, who should be instructed in perfect wisdom.[1]

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[1] APP p. 5.

The Bodhisattva as the Possessor of Perfect Wisdom

Although the Perfection of Wisdom has, after all, nothing to say about perfect wisdom, we are given "indications" of the man of enlightenment, the bodhisattva, and his perfect wisdom.

The state of enlightenment is the state of absence of thought (*acitta*[1]), which is the true "thought of enlightenment" (*bodhicitta*). Enlightened thought, which is the absence of thought, is the real nature of thought, which is "clear" (*prabhāsvara*), without modifications (*avikāra*) or fabrications (*avikalpa*).[2] Behind this rhetoric is simply the doctrine that thought is empty of own-being and isolated. "Absence of thought" (*acittatā*) does not imply that enlightenment is a state of mental blankness--perfect wisdom is not something "beyond" consciousness at all--but rather is the state of isolated thought, unattached and unsupported consciousness:

> A bodhisattva . . . stands at the irreversable stage of a bodhisattva (*avinivartanīya bodhisattvabhūmi*), standing firmly, in consequence of not having any standing-place (*asthānayogena*).[3]

The bodhisattva does not have a standing-place because he is by nature unsupported and unattached, just as perfect wisdom is to be developed "nowhere" because the notion, "where," is essentially relational, while reality is isolated: "When a bodhisattva does not go about anywhere, then he goes about in perfect wisdom."[1] This "being nowhere" of a bodhisattva refers to his state of mind, of course, rather than his physical presence:

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[1] Another major topic of Ch'an tradition: *wu nien* 无念.

[2] APP p. 5.

[3] APP p. 8.

> He goes about [but] does not resort [to the notions] "I go about," or "I do not go about" [or both, or neither], or "I shall go about," or "I shall not go about" [or both, or neither]. He resorts to no dharma, because all dharmas are unapproachable and unappropriable. This is called the bodhisattva's concentrated insight "not grasping at any dharma" (*sarvadharmānupadāno nāma samādhiḥ*).[2]

He does not even entertain the ideas of the perfection of wisdom:

> Form is unthinkable, and so are feeling and the other skandhas. When he does not even conceive (*na sañjanīte*) that form, etc., are unthinkable, then he goes about in perfect wisdom.[3]

The lack of a "standing-place" of a bodhisattva is his standing on emptiness, since no dharma, physical or mental, provides him with anything to stand on. And simply this "no standing-place" is the essence of perfect wisdom. The model for the bodhisattva is of course the Buddha himself, who is the "father" of the bodhisattvas, just as the Perfection of Wisdom is their "mother."[4]

> Nowhere did the Tathagata stand, because his mind had no support. . . . He stood neither in what is composed (*saṁskṛte dhātau*, viz., samsara) nor in what is uncomposed (*asaṁskṛte dhātau*, viz., nirvana), nor did he emerge from them (samsara is nirvana).[5]

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[1] APP p. 220.

[2] APP p. 13.

[3] APP p. 219.

[4] APP pp. 170f.

[5] APP p. 37.

I do not view Tathagatahood as real, and therefore I do not take hold of it, do not adhere to it. For that reason the state of all-knowledge also is free of taking hold of anything, free of adhering to anything.[1]

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[1] APP p. 282.

CHAPTER II

THE MĀDHYAMIKA KĀRIKĀS IN THE LIGHT OF THE PERFECTION OF WISDOM

The Purpose of the Kārikās

There is no statement by Nagarjuna regarding his own purpose in composing the *Kārikās*. There is, however, no need for such a statement, for the purpose of the work is inherent to the composition itself. We recall from the APP:

> Whatever the Lord's disciples teach . . . all that is to be known as the Tathagata's work. . . . It is just an outpouring of the Tathagata's demonstration of Dharma.

And the purpose of the "Tathagata's demonstration of Dharma" is, of course, the cessation of suffering through the extirpation of dependence (*upādāna*). The "Tathagata's work" is expressed at several points in the *Kārikās* in virtually identical terms:

> I honor him [Gautama, who] . . . pointed out dependent origination [which is] the benign stilling of verbal expression (*prapañca-upaśama*). . . . (Dedication)

> Emptiness was proclaimed by the Conquerors (*jina*) as the remedy (*niḥsaraṇa*) to all views. . . . (13.8)

> [The Dharma is] the stilling of all concepts (*upalaṁbha*), the benign stilling of verbal expression. . . . (25.24)

> I honor Gautama, who, relying on compassion, taught the true Dharma for the getting rid of (*prahāṇa*) all views. (27.30)

If we combine these statements, we arrive at the fundamental doctrine basis upon which the *Kārikās* rest: the Dharma of the Tathagatas is essentially the doctrine of emptiness or dependent origination, which was taught as the means of getting rid of all views, concepts, and verbal expressions--this is the Middle Way (*madhyama*-*pratipad*).[1] If we consider the *Kārikās* as a continuation of the outpouring of the Tathagata's demonstration of Dharma, then we can say that it is an expression of the Middle Way, a means (*upāya*), based on the doctrine of dependent origination, of getting rid of all views. A thematic discussion of the *Kārikās*, then, will be largely concerned with the analysis of two basic concepts, dependent origination and views (*dṛṣṭi*), and of the technique by which dependent origination is made the "antidote" to views.

The Nature of Reality

The underlying concept of the *Kārikās* is the same as that of the APP, namely, no own-being--the radical restatement of the traditional doctrine of impermanence.

Impermanence is assumed as axiomatic by Nagarjuna, at least from the superficial standpoint (*samvṛti*-*satya*):

> Impermanence is never not found in beings. (21.4)

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[1] Cf. MMK 24.18.

> A being without coming-to-be and ceasing-to-be is not found. (21.8)
>
> All beings are always characterized by old-age and death (*jarāmaraṇa-dharma*). . . . (7.24)
>
> If there exists an entity, it follows (that it is) not without age and death. (25.4)

Of more fundamental importance is the relation between impermanence and no own-being:

> The arising of own-being from causes and conditions is not admissible, for own-being arisen from causes and conditions would be derivative (*kṛtaka*). But how can there be derivative own-being, for own-being is [by definition] non-derivative and independent (*nirapekṣa*) of another. (15.1f.)

Own-being is thus being which is intrinsic to an entity, that which makes it independently existent or that which enables it to be an ontological identity (i.e., A is A because A exists as such). The own-being of something cannot, by definition, be derived from a source of being exterior to it, quite apart from the fact that such a notion of derivative being would lead to an infinite regress. Independent being means being which is dependent only upon itself: what exists by own-being (a *sadbhāva*) exists by nature--its own nature--and what exists by nature, essentially, cannot *not* exist:

> If there were is-ness by nature (*prakṛtyā*), there could be no is-not-ness of it, for the becoming-otherwise (i.e., change) of [what is so by] nature never occurs. (15.8)

Own-being thus means essential permanence, for something cannot not be what it is by nature, and if it exists by nature it cannot cease to exist as that something. "Own-being is not affected"[1] in any way; therefore, what exists by its own-being cannot have been produced (cannot have derived being), cannot be destroyed (cannot by nature lose its nature), and cannot be changed or modified in any way.[2]

There is no third alternative: either something exists, has own-being, and thus cannot not exist--or it does not exist at all,[3] in which case the same permanent attributes apply to it as they would with own-being, viz., unproduced, unstopped, and unchanging. This is a crucial point in countering the rather common misinterpretation of Nagarjuna as a nihilist. Both concepts, existence *and* non-existence, are based on the doctrine of own-being:

> Eternalism [says], "there exists something by [its] own-being, it does not *not* exist." "It does not exist now, it did exist before," thus follows annihilationism. (15.11)

Note that for Nagarjuna the traditional doctrine of impermanence fits into the category of annihilationism, while Samkhya, Yoga, Jainism, and Vedanta would be the usual examples of eternalism.[4]

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[1] MMK 24.33.

[2] MMK 24.37f.

[3] Nagarjuna makes rigorous use of the excluded-middle principle. Cf. MMK 8.7; 25.14 as examples. On the whole subject of the logical premises and operations of the *Kārikās*, see R. H. Robinson, "Some Logical Aspects of Nāgārjuna's System," PEW, VI (Jan., 1957), 291-308. A contrary (and dubious) point of view is to be found in A. Kunst, "The Concept of Excluded Middle in Buddhism," OR, XXI (1957), 141-47.

[4] The usual Hinayana meaning of eternalism (*śāśvatavāda*) and annihilationism (*ucchedavāda*) is more narrowly concerned with the problem of the permanence or cessation of a "self": cf. DN i.13, 34; SN ii.18-20, iv.400f.; AK ix.270 for examples.

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The alternative to the doctrine of own-being is not non-existence, but simply "no own-being"--the two concepts "existence" and "non-existence" do not apply to reality. Indeed, if the concept of existence does not apply, the concept of the absence of that existence is doubly meaningless.[1] On the other hand, the doctrine of no own-being is, at least on the pragmatic level (vyāvahārika), the only applicable concept.

The doctrine of no own-being is necessitated by the phenomenon of change: "Because of the seeing of becoming-otherwise (anyathābhāva-darśana) is the non-own-being-ness of beings," though, as the next verse implies, this is valid only as pragmatic truth. Indeed the whole body of pragmatic truth is rooted in change, including the doctrines of Buddhism as the Marga, as chapter 24.36-40 indicates.[2] In this connection Nagarjuna states that no conventional truths would be possible except on the premise of emptiness, since on the opposite premise, that of own-being, "effect, cause, actor, instrument [of action], action, origination, cessation, and fruit [of Buddhist endeavor]"--would all be inconceivable.

The corrective to the erroneous doctrines of existence and non-existence is the doctrine of dependent origination, and it is the implications of this doctrine which form the key principle of the *Kārikās*. The beginning of the work is a dedication to Gautama as the teacher of dependent origination:

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[1] Cf. MMK 15.5.

[2] The concepts "no own-being" and "change" are, however, only valid as pragmatic truths; from the ultimate standpoint they too are invalid. Cf. MMK 13.4ff.

> . . . who pointed out dependent origination [which is] the benign stilling of verbal expression, without cessation, without origination, without eternality, without annihilation, not one, not many, not coming, not going.

Here dependent origination is defined as the "benign stilling of verbal expressions (*prapañca*-*upaśamaṁ* *śivam*)," and the whole of the *Kārikās* might be regarded as a detailed commentary on this definition. Each chapter of the text deals with one or more "expressions" or notions and, through application of the logic of dependent origination to the analysis of their conceptual content, each of these notions is "stilled" --dissolved away in the same way that the concepts of existence and non-existence are.

This aspect of the application of dependent origination will be discussed further on; at this point we are more particularly concerned with what dependent origination indicates about the nature of reality: if the world does not "exist," then how does it "dependently originate"? Any answer to this question will be an expression of pragmatic truth. The concepts of existence and non-existence have been shown to be inadequate as explanations of the nature of reality, but dependent origination does provide an adequate explanation--even though, as we shall see, in the ultimate sense (*paramārthatas*) dependent origination provides no "explanation" of anything whatsoever. Nonetheless, it is only by means of pragmatic truth that the highest truth can be indicated at all.[1] If an explanation is to be made, it will have to be based on the concept of dependent origination.

In chap. 24 the necessity for the doctrine of dependent origination as an explanatory principle is presented quite clearly. Simultaneously the term "emptiness" (*śūnyatā*) is defended from misinterpretation, since "emptiness" is defined as a synonym for "dependent origination."[2] Indeed, the doctrine of dependent origination once seen, the term "emptiness" should not cause any "distress" through misinterpreting it as non-existence, annihilation, nihilism, etc.[3] It is interpreting reality in terms of existence and non-existence which leads to the misunderstanding of emptiness as being non-existence. But he who interprets reality in terms of these categories holds the premise of own-being, which will not "hold up" (*yujyate*) when examined:

> You reject all worldly practical affairs since you reject the emptiness of dependent origination. There would be nothing [which] could be done, action would not be begun, the actor would be inactive, [if you] reject emptiness. The world will be unproduced, unstopped, unchanging, deprived in [its] own-being (here meaning "nature") of [its] varying conditions. If the non-empty [exists], there is no obtaining of the unobtained, making an end to suffering, and elimination of all the afflictions. (24.36-39)

The conclusion is inescapable: "Everything holds (*yujyate*) if emptiness holds, but nothing holds if emptiness does not

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[1] MMK 24.10.

[2] MMK 24.18.

[3] MMK 24.7.

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not,"[1] where we can interpret "everything" to mean "all worldly practical truths." If the premise of own-being is held, neither the simplest everyday event nor the Buddhist Dharma itself can be explained. The premise of own-being manifestly contradicts the common-sense "facts" of experience, and the world is only intelligible if seen to be "empty," i.e., dependently originated and without own-being. Our conventional experience is that things, events, and actions have causes, beginnings, and ends--they change. All of this would be impossible if the world "exists." Thus the world does not exist at all, but this does not mean that it is non-existent but only that it is dependently originated.

The whole realm, then, of meaningful discourse is only made possible on the premise of emptiness. This is the realm of pragmatic truth, apart from which nothing at all can be said. Ironically, the very next chapter following the defense of "practical" emptiness, shifts to the standpoint of ultimate truth where the main point of the preceding chapter is apparently contradicted. The purpose of the doctrine of emptiness is to lead us to the attainment of nirvana, but in 25.1-3 this all seems to be called into question:

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> If everything is empty, there is neither arising nor disappearing [of things, and so] from the getting-rid of or cessation of what is nirvana sought? If everything is not empty, there is neither arising nor disappearing, [and so] from the getting-rid of or cessation of what is nirvana sought? Not avoided, not attained . . . thus is nirvana said to be.

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[1] MMK 24.14.

Here in fact is the burden of the whole work, namely, to demonstrate that although pragmatic truth is necessary as a means to teach the ultimate truth, it is not able itself to reach that ultimate truth. In chapter 24 pragmatic truth is shown to be valid only on the premise of emptiness or no own-being. In the rest of the Kārikās the same premise is used in order to demonstrate the ultimate invalidity of pragmatic truth. In chapter 24 we are shown the place emptiness necessarily has in validating pragmatic truth, but we are warned that the doctrine of emptiness is not the ultimate truth, but merely a means to it:

> Emptiness was proclaimed by the Conquerors as the remedy for all views; but those were declared incurable (asādhya) for whom there is a view of emptiness. (13.8)
>
> Neither "empty" nor "not empty" should be said, nor both, nor neither; but they are said for the sake of an indicator (prajñapti). (22.11)

And in order to drive this fact home the doctrine of emptiness itself is shown to be ultimately unsubstantial in chapter 13 and 20.16ff. What then can legitimately be said about the ultimate nature of reality? Precisely nothing--as the Kārikās repeatedly demonstrate. The only explicit statement "characterizing" ultimate reality is purely negative in content, defining it as "not dependent on another" (aparapratyaya), "pacified" (śānta), "unmanifested by verbal expression" (prapañcair aprapañcita), "free of fabrication" (nirvikalpa), and "not diverse" (*anānārtha*).[1]

Nirvana is similarly characterized in chapter 25 as "not avoided" (*aprahīṇa*), "not attained" (*asaṁprāpta*), "not cut-off" (*anucchinna*), "not eternal" (*aśāśvata*), "not stopped" (*aniruddha*), "not originated" (*anutpanna*).[2] In the same chapter we are told that "what is conditioned by (*pratītya*) or dependent on (*upādāya*) the conditions (*vibhāva*) of coming and going, that, without conditions (*apratītya*) and independent (*anupādāya*) is taught [to be] nirvana."[3] And thus, further on, comes the conclusion: "There is no distinguishing whatsoever of samsara from nirvana. . . . The extent of nirvana is the extent of samsara; there is not even the tiniest interval between them."[4] The state of transmigration, of coming and going in the sense of rebirth and death, is characterized by depending--it is the sphere of dependent origination as well as of men who depend (*upādāna*) and hence suffer. Now, this same state of going and coming is also free of dependency: in the ultimate sense it is nirvana. We recall from chapter 24 that the world is necessarily dependent if it is to function at all; the world of composite (*saṁskṛta*) things and events, the samsara, is essentially dependently originated in all of its aspects. Nirvana is non-composite (*asaṁskṛta*)[5] and as such is not an aspect or quality or characteristic of the (pragmatic) world, and it is not subject to the principle of dependent origination. Nirvana is the state of not clinging (*anupādāna*),[1] but more significantly yet, it is the state in which there are no conditions (*apratītya*) and no dependency (*anupādāya*). But this would mean that it is a state in which the necessary dependent relations between things do not obtain, and such a state of affairs is supposedly impossible. It is at this point that the doctrine of two truths is applicable. The world of common discourse, pragmatic truth, is indeed only possible because of dependent origination (emptiness). But from the standpoint of ultimate truth, the concepts and terms of common discourse are seen to be mere mental constructs (*vikalpa*) which, when the dialectics of dependent origination are applied to them analytically, are shown to be "empty" of real validity, of their own-being as "real" concepts. In a sense, then, from the standpoint of ultimate truth, *sub specie nirvani*, "dependence" is simply another view or fabrication of the mind, isolated from reality as are all other views, including those of emptiness and nirvana.[2]

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[1] MMK 18.9. The content of this passage is discussed below in another context.

[2] MMK 25.3.

[3] MMK 25.9.

[4] MMK 25.19f.

[5] MMK 25.13.

Putting this another way, we can say that reality is one: it is the world as it really is, howsoever *that* may be. There are two modes of perceiving reality, samsaric and nirvanic. The samsaric mode sees things in a dependent manner: the samsaric mind is "thirsting for," clinging to, depending upon a world (including the person himself) which *can* be clung to and depended upon (*upādāna*) to supply the sustenance (*upādāna*) for that dependency. Now of course the world, in its essential impermanence and lack of own-being *cannot* be clung to, and so what actually provides the substance for clinging is a mental fabrication of the world, a conceptual imagining which (apparently) enables one to "hold on" to the world and render it "dependable." In other words, samsara is the world-made-dependable, the world of "meaningful relationships," which can be thought about, understood, and *literally* assimilated as "food for thought." All of this fabrication, of course, has absolutely no effect upon the world as it is and as it is seen in the nirvanic mode. What Nagarjuna does in the *Kārikās* is to utilize the very principle by which the world is made dependable, namely, the idea of real interdependence between things in the world--dependent origination--in order to demolish that apparent but contrived dependability, and to allow the world to be seen without any reliance upon the spectacles of dependency. The world can only be *explained* by means of the concept of dependent origination and related notions, but the world so explained is samsara, the realm of suffering which clinging has fashioned for itself. The same world, unexplained and not requiring explanation, is nirvana. To use a simple analogy, I might be terrified of dogs, having perhaps once been bitten as a child. All dogs now inspire fear--bulldogs, boxers, collies, poodles, and Chihuahuas--no matter how vicious or harmless they might be in themselves. I have, in Buddhist terms, fabricated a canine samsara which brings me endless yet unnecessary suffering. The same aggregate of dogs, once I have somehow or other become free of the delusion I cling to, become denizens of nirvana. Throughout this intense drama, however, the dogs have been totally unaffected by either their relegation to samsara or their nirvanic apotheosis.

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[1] Cf. MMK 16.9.

[2] Cf. MMK 13.8 and 16.10.

The Relation of Thought to Reality

If the distinction between practical truth and ultimate truth is fundamental to the *Kārikās*, a major question to be dealt with is the relation between pragmatic truth and thought activity in general. In order to get at the approach of the *Kārikās* to this issue we must first take a look at the major terms referring to this activity. The first of these is a group of closely related words based on the root *kḷp*: *saṁkalpa*, *parikalpa*, *kalpanā*, and chief among them, *vikalpa*, which is here rendered "(mental) construct" or "fabrication."

From various passages in the text this term as well as its relatives are seen to be the chief designations for all types of conceptualization.

> One should not fabricate any fabrications (*vikalpa*) relating to form [or any of the other *skandhas*]. (4.5)

The "*vikalpas*" here refer specifically to ideas about the relation between form, as an effect, and its causes; by extension, the particular *vikalpa* here is the concept of causal relationship in general, which here as in several other contexts is subject to the analytic "refutation by means of emptiness" (*parihāraṁ śūnyatayā*, 4.8f.). Several other concepts are spoken of specifically as *vikalpa*:

> "traversed, being-traversed, and untraversed" (2.14)
> the "mover" as being "other than" the "motion" (2.20)
> logical relation between "passion" and what is "impassioned" (6.7)
> "birth, death, and age" (11.6)
> "form, sound, smells, taste , touches, dharmas" as the "object" (*vastu*) of "desire, hatred, and delusion" (23.7)
> "is and is not" (9.12)
> that "the Tathagata exists" or "does not exist" either after death or during his life (22.13)
> "samsara" and "nirvana" (16.10)

It seems clear from such a list that *vikalpa* refers to all of the concepts which the *Kārikās* subject to the "refutation by emptiness," and that therefore the purpose of the doctrine of emptiness is the destruction of *vikalpa*. The necessity for and the means to this destruction of *vikalpa* is made clear in chapter 18:

> When [the *vikalpas*] "I" and "mine" are destroyed . . . dependency is stopped; from the stopping of that is the destruction of birth. Release is because of the destruction of the afflictions and action. Afflictions and action are because of fabrication (*vikalpa*), because of ex-pression (*prapañca*), but ex-pression is stopped in emptiness. (18.4f.)

The term *prapañca*[1] is closely related to *vikalpa* as the above passage suggests, and as the term appears in 22.15:

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[1] Cf. MMK 18.9. The term is rendered here often as "(imaginative and verbal) ex-pression," which suggests an affinity of meaning with the *kḷp* derivatives and their translation as "fabrication" or "construction." Cf. May, *Candrakīrti*, n. 562.

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> Those who ex-press (mentally imagine and verbally express) the enlightened (buddha) forever beyond expression, they all--struck down by ex-pression (prapañcahata)--do not see (understand the truth about) the Tathagata.

Prapañca thus suggests both mental fabrication (vikalpa) and verbal expression of such fabrication. This richness of meaning is to be seen in the opening Dedication and at the close of chapter 25:

> I honor the Enlightened . . . who pointed out dependent origination, the benign stilling of [conceptualized and verbalized] expression.
>
> The Dharma [is] the stilling of all concepts (upalaṁbha), the benign stilling of ex-pression. . . .

It might be said that Nagarjuna's work carries out the aims of the Buddha's teaching of Dharma in a very precise sense: he utilized the principle of emptiness in the stylistic form of the argumentation of actual verbal debate, attacking prapañca in the senses both of the conceptualization and of the verbalization of ignorance.

In chapter 23 the three kleśas, desire, hatred, and delusion (rāga, dveṣa, and moha) are said to "proceed from fabrication (saṁkalpa), for they arise dependent upon the pleasant, the unpleasant, and errors." Here the term "errors" refers to a variety of vikalpa, viz., certain notions (grāha, 23.13) which are, even from the standpoint of pragmatic truth, incorrect or inapplicable--such as, that things impure, impermanent, and productive of suffering are seen to be pure, permanent, and productive of happiness.[1] These are traditional

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[1] Cf. MMK 23.21f.

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"errors," and as such are of course to be extirpated if the kleśas, and the suffering which they cause, are to be stopped. On the other hand, chapter 23 demonstrates that from the standpoint of ultimate truth the concept of "error" itself is simply more vikalpa, even though it is a valid pragmatic concept in Buddhist teaching. "Error" means "an incorrect notion," but when even the concept of "concept" (grāha) is seen to be ultimately as empty of substance as any other concept, all discussion of "erroneous" concepts becomes doubly insubstantial. The following verse is thus a Madhyamika double entendre:

> Thus ignorance is stopped from the stopping of error;
> when ignorance is stopped, the formations, etc., are
> stopped. (23.23)

On the level of pragmatic truth this can be interpreted in straightforward manner to mean that when the errors derived from clinging are put to an end, then ignorance will cease and nirvana be attained as the binding force of the formations (saṁskāra) ceases, putting an end to rebirth. On the level of ultimate truth, however, we can interpret more radically: the fabricated concept "ignorance" will be stopped when the fabrication "error" is stopped, and when the fabrication "ignorance" is stopped, the fabrication "formations" (and all other fabrications, for that matter) will be stopped. In this sense, chapter 23 provides a good example of the application of the principle of the two truths.

The close association between concept-formation (*vikalpa*, *prapañca*) and clinging-dependence (*upādāna*) can be further brought out by a consideration of the terms *graha*, *grāha* (ap-prehending, concept, notion), and similar words as Nagarjuna employs them. In 15.10, the terms "is" and "is not" are criticized:

> "Is" is the notion (*grāha*) of eternalism, "is not" is the view (*darśana*) of annihilationism; therefore the clear-sighted should not adhere to is-ness and is-notness.

Here the terms *grāha* and *darśana* (equivalent to *dṛṣṭi*, see below) are synonymous, while in 22.13 *grāha* and *vikalpa* are seen to be equivalents:

> He who has conceived (*gṛhīta*) the gross notion (*grāha*) that the Tathagata exists [or] does not exist, [in his] fabricating (*vikalpayan*) he would also fabricate [such notions] of the extinguished [Tathagata].

In 16.9, clinging and concept-formation are directly related:

> Those for whom there is the notion (*graha*) "free of dependency (*upādāna*) I shall attain nirvana, nirvana will be mine"--for them there is a great notion out of dependency (*upādāna*-*mahāgraha*).

Since the verb, *gṛhyate*, means "grasping," this relationship is brought out even more clearly in 19.5 where certain concepts (unfixed time and fixed time) are shown to be "ungraspable" (*na* *gṛhyate*).[1]

In this connection the term *upalaṁbha* (prehension, concept) should be mentioned. In 4.1 the idea of a cause of form for an as yet non-existent form is shown to be

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[1] Cf. MMK 20.3. At MMK 23.15, on the other hand, the concept "*grāha*" is itself shown to be "ungraspable."

"inconceivable" (*na* *upalabhyate*, not prehended) where the term parallels the usage of "*na* *gṛhyate*" and "*na* *vikalpyate*," etc. And at the end of chapter 25 the Dharma, the principle of dependent origination, is said to be "the stilling of all prehensions" (*sarva*-*upalaṁbha*-*upaśama*), where *upalaṁbha* is synonymous with *vikalpa*, *prapañca*, and *dṛṣṭi*.[1] In these two passages a distinction of levels is again made. The first passage maintains that a certain concept is manifestly inconceivable because it is logically contradictory--viz., the cause of a non-existent effect. Here particular concepts are found to be logically incompatible, simply from the standpoint of conventional logic, pragmatic truth. The second passage, however, implies that the ultimate truth is free of *all* concepts, including those about the "inconceivability" of "logically incompatible" concepts.

Besides the *kḷp* family of terms, the term *dṛṣṭi* (view) is the most common expression for concept-formation. The root *dṛś* (to see) of this term is ambiguous in a most productive way, however, unlike the terms derived from the roots *kḷp*, *pra-pañc*, and *gṛh*, all of which refer specifically to the activity of clinging thought: there is a "seeing" which is illusory, a "seeing" which is relatively true, and also a "seeing" which is ultimately true. The first two of these are the result of clinging, i.e. they are *vikalpa*, but the last is the enlightened seeing from the standpoint of ultimate truth. The first, false views (*mithyā-dṛṣṭi*) are those already false for Buddhist tradition, such as the "own-body" view (*svakāya-dṛṣṭi*, cf. 23.5) and, above all, the views of eternalism and annihilationism.[1] Ideas which lead to these views are erroneous, as all common Buddhist tradition would agree. Just as one fabricates a fabrication (*vikalpaṁ vikalpayati*), so does one "see" a view:

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[1] Cf. MMK 18.4, 25.2, 27.30.

> Should it be for you [that] coming-to-be and ceasing-to-be are seen (*dṛśyate*), coming-to-be and ceasing-to-be are seen because of delusion (*moha*). (21.11)
>
> If you see (*anupaśyasi*) real-being (*sadbhāva*) of beings [existing] because of their own-being, then, this being so, you see (*paśyasi*) beings without causes and conditions. (24.16)

But such things as "coming-to-be," "ceasing-to-be," "real-being," and "causeless beings" are of course not really *seen* at all, since they are mere conceptual fabrications. Through the application of the refutation by emptiness we are shown that upon critical "looking" at the notion it is not possible to find it to be ultimately "there"--it is a figment, albeit a useful one. So in 4.1 where a notion (a causeless effect) is found to be *not conceivable* (*na upalabhyate*), its opposite (an effectless cause) is likewise *not seen* (*na dṛśyate*). In this particular instance, the notions being refuted are concepts of pragmatic truth rather than false worldly errors, since from the standpoint of ultimate truth all conceptualizations are subject to the refutation. Thus the true seeing is not the seeing even of relatively true Buddhist doctrines:

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[1] Cf. MMK 21.14f., 15.10, and 27 passim.

> Emptiness was proclaimed by the Conquerors as the remedy for all views; those were declared incurable (*asādhya*) for whom there is a view of emptiness. (13.8)

True seeing is alluded to in 14.1f. in a subtly paradoxical manner. In 14.1 the relatively true (i.e. common Buddhist) concepts of "the seer, the seeing, and the seeable (*draṣṭṛ*, *darśana*, *draṣṭavya*) are refuted from the higher standpoint, as had already been demonstrated in chapter 3. The very next verse says, in recalling chapter 6, "[And] likewise, the impassioned, passion, and the object of passion should be *seen*, and the rest of the 3-fold *kleśas* and the rest of the *āyatanas*." Here "should be seen" implies the application of the concept-calming (*prapañcopaśama*) remedy of emptiness. Similarly in 15.6:

> Those who see own-being, derived being, being and non-being--they do not see the truth-reality (*tattva*) in the instruction of the enlightened.[1]
>
> Those of little intelligence (*alpabuddhi*) who *see* is-ness and is-not-ness (*astitva*, *nāstitva*) do not see the benign stilling of the *seeable* (*draṣṭavya-upaśamaṁ śivam*). (5.8)

In this passage we can interpret "the seeable" as any "sight" (*dṛṣṭi*) of a conceptual nature--i.e., "the seeable" here is synonymous with "fabrication" or "expression." In the preceeding passage from chapter 15, "the truth-reality in the instruction of the enlightened" is simply the critical doctrine of emptiness or dependent origination. This allows us to "see" (i.e. critically understand) relative, pragmatic truths:

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[1] Whereas, at MMK 26.10, the "knower" (*vidvan*) does see reality (*tattva-darśana*).

> He who sees dependent origination sees [that "the non-empty" is a manifestly false concept], as well as suffering, its origin, its cessation, and the way. (24.40)

But, higher than this, we "see" through the refutation by emptiness that even these truths are "stilled" (*śānta*). Emptiness ultimately is used to refute the doctrine of emptiness itself (chapter 13) and thus the ultimate truth cannot be the doctrine of emptiness: it is that which is apart from all doctrine.

If we examine the nature of concept-formation yet more closely we find that not only is the source of views to be found in clinging, but also the very structure of these concepts is inseparable from clinging. If this is the case, then the cessation of clinging would *ipso facto* entail the cessation not only of concept-*formation*, but also the cessation of the structure of the concept itself. The very internal coherence of an idea is something which is to be "stilled," emptied, when seen from the ultimate standpoint--and this of course is the function of the *Kārikās*' refutation by emptiness.

At this point we might take a look at this clinging-aspect of concepts, though in the broader sense this is the subject of the whole text. The question, briefly, is "In what sense do concepts 'cling,' and what is the 'cessation of

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clinging' in such a context?" The general term for clinging (dependency) is the familiar upādāna, which is employed in traditional fashion:

> When "mine" and "I" are destroyed, both outside and [with regard to] the self, dependency is stopped; from the stopping of that is the destruction of birth. (18.4)
>
> Thirst (tṛṣṇā) has feeling as its condition, for the object of feeling is thirsted for; the thirsting one depends on the four-fold dependency. (26.6f.)

This is all good (at least from the relative standpoint) Buddhist doctrine, though a sharper look will show how radically the term upādāna may be understood in such passages as the above. In order to get at the notion of the inherent clinging of concepts we must look at the doctrine of dependent origination as it applies to the nature of concepts. This can be seen in quite simple cases: e.g., in 23.10f. the concepts of pleasant and unpleasant (śubha and aśubha) are shown to be dependent on (pratītya) each other for their meaning, and it is this very mutual dependency that renders it impossible for either concept to exist of itself:

> The unpleasant, dependent (pratītya) upon which we could explain the pleasant, does not exist independent of (anapekṣya) of the pleasant, hence the pleasant does not occur. The pleasant, dependent upon which we could explain the unpleasant, does not exist independent of the unpleasant, hence the unpleasant does not occur.

The concepts lack own-being; they are "empty" because they depend on each other for their meaning. Similarly in chapter 6:

> If the impassioned (*rakta*) were prior to passion (*rāga*)--apart from passion--passion would be dependent (*pratītya*) upon it; passion would exist when the impassioned existed. On the other hand, the impassioned not existing, whence would passion be? . . . A joint arising, moreover, is not applicable to passion and the impassioned, for they would both be mutually independent. (6.1ff.)

Here again the two concepts are mutually indispensable and cannot exist apart from each other. A general statement of conceptual dependency is given in chapter 14:

> An "other" is dependent upon [another] "other"; an "other" is not "other" than another without an "other"; and that which is dependent on something does not occur [as] "other" from it. (14.5)

In each of these instances and many more throughout the text, the nature of the concepts employed for practical affairs, as relative truth, is repeatedly brought out. Just as the everyday activities of the world are inconceivable unless they are dependently originated, empty, so all concepts are dependently originated: they have meaning only in relation to other concepts, and thus they lack their own being, having only derived being.

Such is relative, pragmatic, "superficial" truth. From the ultimate standpoint, however, we recall from chapter 15 that the idea of derived-being is itself "empty," for derived-being implies the own-being of that from which a concept derives its relative "being" or meaning. In the example above from chapter 23, this can be seen in the demonstration that unless either of the concepts pleasant and unpleasant can exist of itself, the other is "underivable"; but since each simultaneously depends on the other, neither can be separately established--they "cling" to each other and thereby create each other: the fabrication fabricates its own meaning without ever removing itself from the context of fabricating--viz., clinging--and this fact is what underlies the insubstantiality and *ultimate* unreality of all conceptualizations.

This principle that the *meaning* of a concept is itself an empty fabrication might be clarified somewhat if we recall the two-fold sense which clinging has in Buddhist tradition. Fundamental to the understanding of the term *upādāna* is that it means both the act of clinging and the object of the clinging. I usually translate the term as "dependency," since in English this has both verbal and nominal senses: my depending on something renders it a dependency. Similarly the word "feed" has both grammatical functions, since a horse can "feed" on its "feed." Hence what *upādāna* clings to *becomes its upādāna*, and thus we get the extended meanings of the term: "Material," "fuel," etc.[1]

The clinging consciousness fabricates a conceptual world to use as fuel (*upādāna*) for its own sustenance. The term "illusion" (*māyā*) can be applied to this fabrication, but

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[1] Cf. The Critique of Fire and Fuel (MMK chapter 10) where the analogy is fully drawn out. *Upādāna* is usually referred to in the tradition as four-fold: "dependency" as sense-pleasure (*kāma*), precepts and vows (*śīla-vrata*), views (*drṣṭi*), and the doctrine of a self (*ātmavāda*). A related notion is the four-fold "sustenance" (*āhāra*). See the many references in the PTSD and the AK.

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it must be understood in a sense distinct from the much more radical meaning given to it both in later Yogacara school and in the Vedanta. The rhetoric of illusion is made use of by Nagarjuna a few times:

> Like an illusion, like a dream, like a city of the Gandharvas, thus "origination," thus "duration," thus "destruction" have been dispelled. (7.34)
>
> Forms, sounds, tastes, touches, odors, dharmas sixfold are fabricated the object (vastu) of desire, hatred, and delusion. Form . . . and dharmas are isolated (kevala), appearances of a Gandharva city, like a mirage or a dream. Whence in those [six] like an illusory person (māyāpuruṣakalpa) and like a reflection (pratibiṁbasama) will pleasant or unpleasant be? (23.7-9)

It should be clear from the discussion to this point that what is illusory is the own-being of the various fabrications: these, under the analysis by emptiness, are indeed dispelled like the empty creations of a magician, who can fashion the illusion of a man, and like dreams and mirages. Each of these can be dispelled when closely scrutinized by a discerning eye. The magical man appears to exist in its own right, but on closer examination we find that it appears only because of the magician's power to trick our senses (say through hypnosis).[1] Dreams similarly seem to have a reality of their own, but when the dreamer wakes, he realizes that the dreams were "empty of own-being" and originated dependent upon his own fabricating abilities. In this way the dream is seen to be "isolated," apart from the reality which is lent to it by the deluded sleeper, just as a mirage is isolated from reality, though dependent upon reality for its appearance. Equally isolated from reality are the categories of form, sound, etc.: they are the result of (Buddhist) fabrication, just as the qualities of pleasant and unpleasant are thought to inhere in external reality. The isolatedness of such categories as form, sound, and the rest, is demonstrated in early chapters (e.g., chaps. 3 and 5). The clinging-derived "errors" ascribing qualities to reality are doubly isolated from reality, since not only their referents, viz., forms, sounds, etc., are fabricated categories, but they themselves are empty of own-being, as chap. 23 goes on to demonstrate.

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[1] Cf. MMK 17.31ff.

From the standpoint of the double-truth, illusion is two-fold. On the level of superficial truth illusion means to regard the world and oneself as possessed of own-being and to live according to that basic mistake, using own-being as a sustenance for clinging. The dispeller of illusion in this sense is the doctrine of emptiness or dependent origination. On the level of ultimate truth, of course, the whole body of Buddhist doctrine, including that of emptiness, is seen to be fabrication and is itself to be dispelled. The illusion, however, on both levels, is not the phenomenal world, the world of common experience--it is the attribution of permanence, own-being, to the phenomenal world, essentially by means of conceptual fabrication. It would be a fundamental mistake to equate illusion with phenomena, unless by "phenomenal" is meant reality *plus* the attribution of own-being to reality. The old example of the chariot[1] is appropriate here. It is not the fact of the chariot, as an instrument for riding, which is in question, but the absence of a permanent element among the parts which make it up. It is the concept "chariot" which is the illusion, a convenient fiction (*vyāvahārika*) fashioned by the mind, but which is isolated from the reality upon which one rides, and which is not illusory. Murti's Hegelian-Vedantic approach, on the other hand, claims more for the concept of illusion in Nagarjuna than I believe is warranted:

> The world-illusion is presented to the Mādhyamika as the total and persistent conflict of Reason--the interminable opposition of philosophical viewpoints. He is solely concerned with the Transcendental illusion. As the several philosophical views are views of reality, the Mādhyamika, in being aware of the illusoriness of the views, is aware of the illusoriness of the world which is characterized by those views. For instance, in rejecting the different theories of causation (satkāryavāda, asatkāryavāda, etc.) the Mādhyamika has rejected causation as a constitutive feature of the real.[2]

This conclusion does not follow either from my own interpretation or from Murti's. The demonstration of the "emptiness" of views of causality allows only the conclusion that the views--as any views--are not adequate to reality as seen from the ultimate standpoint. Reality is subject to causality in some sense, and the pragmatic truth of the doctrine of

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[1] Cf. SN i.135 and MP 26f.

[2] Murti, *Central Philosophy*, p. 216.

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dependent origination is the valid statement of that causality. The ultimate truth is not that reality is not subject to causality--a difficult view to prove in any case--but simply that any view of causality, including dependent origination, is devoid of substance, empty of "own-meaning." The term and concept "chariot" is valid as part of the coinage of verbal exchange (vyavahāra), but when subjected to scrutiny it is seen to be, like paper money, worthless in its own right, valuable only relatively, as a symbol for that which it represents--in this case, the actual chariot. Nagarjuna gives no statements about the nature of reality when he is speaking from the ultimate standpoint since any statement or concept as such would be "mis-taken" for reality by the clinging consciousness. We find no hint of a "noumenal" reality or absolute--a substrate hidden by phenomenal appearance. Neither on the level of the surface nor on that of the ultimate truth is there any basis for a Nagarjunian doctrine of a metaphysical absolute, unless dependent origination is so considered, but this would be stretching a point. The concept of an absolute finds a place in Yogacara tradition, but I submit that such a concept is neither explicitly nor implicitly to be found in the Kārikās. There is an "absolute" truth (as paramārtha-satya can be translated), but this is simply the fact that what is fabricated about reality is not reality, and this fact is demonstrated by taking the doctrine of dependent origination in an "absolute" sense in order to show the emptiness of all views.

The Relationship between Enlightenment and Reality

If we examine the language in chapter 18 used to characterize the ultimate nature of reality, we find that it could apply equally well as a description of the state of enlightenment in which reality is perceived. Both are free of dependency, either in the sense of clinging or in the sense of relational dependency; as the text expresses it, they are "not dependent on others" (*aparapratyaya*). This is the "pacified" or quieted (*śānta*) aspect of things which by nature do not "speak out" (*prapañca*) about themselves since they do not depend and hence do not have to rely on that cognitive manifestation of dependency, fabricative thought (*vikalpa*). Real things are ultimately characterized by silence, the absence of talk and concepts from their nature. Similarly, the enlightened consciousness is precisely to be characterized by its silence, its freedom from thought construction and verbalizations. This is the state brought about by emptying conceptual thought of its contents, and this emptying is made possible because of the Dharma of the Enlightened: "the stilling (*upaśama*) of all concepts, the benign stilling of verbal expression."

The notion of quiet, calm, pacified (*śama*, *upaśama*, *śānta*) appears several times in the course of the *Kārikās* with a somewhat ambiguous meaning. It is used, first, in referring to the quiet state of reality (and enlightenment) itself, and this is its meaning in the above verse from chapter

18. The same sense is found at 22.12: "Here in the pacified (*śānte*), whence the four-fold [view], eternal, not eternal, [both, or neither]?" That is to say, reality is free of views and is quiet.

On the other hand, there remains the problem of quieting down the plethora of words, concepts, and views which are the currency of samsara. When these are subjected to the Madhyamika process of pacification they simply vanish, since they have no other reality than sheer "verbosity":

> Whatever is dependent (*pratītya*) is pacified by nature; therefore [the concept] "originating" is pacified, and also "origination." (7.16)
>
> From the stilling (*śama*) of "self" and "belonging-to-self" [one] is free of "mine" and free of "ego." (18.2b)
>
> That by which one conceives, that which is the notion, the conceiver, and the conceived--all are pacified; therefore no notion is found. (23.15)

In the language of the APP, there is an essential identity between the "unattached cognition (*asañga*-*jñāna*) of the Tathagatas" and the "isolation of the essential nature of all dharmas." Both are free of dependent relation, in other words.

If such is the nature of enlightenment, it follows that enlightenment has no particular content, any more than does its opposite, the state of clinging. Both are general "attitudes" towards experience--one at-tached and the other de-tached--though neither is limited to any particular kind of experiences: samsara is the whole of experience-via-clinging, while nirvana is the whole of experience-via-letting-go.

Śāsana: The Teaching of Enlightenment

The final paradox of the *Kārikās* is the conclusion to chapter 25: "[The Dharma which is] the stilling of all concepts, the benign stilling of verbal expression--no [such] Dharma was taught by the Buddha to anyone anywhere." Superficially considered, this might indicate that Nagarjuna is boldly stating that such a doctrine as he himself has been illustrating through more than four hundred verses, is something new to Buddhism, which the Buddha either did not know, or did not choose to teach. This, of course, is to miss the point of the passage, which is entirely in line with the notion that enlightenment has no content, and thus, strictly speaking, is not something which can be "taught" or "learned" at all. Teaching and learning, at least in the conventional sense of the terms, can only take place through the use of words and the concepts indicated by the words: the very obstacles to enlightenment. But if the final message of the Buddha is totally devoid of "content," an exhortation to radical silence, we are still left with the huge body of traditional Buddhist teaching in *sūtra*, *vinaya*, and *abhidharma* either to justify or to dispense with altogether.

The answer is found in the doctrine of the two truths, as it is stated in chapter 24:

> Resting upon two truths is the Dharma-teaching of the Buddhas: the worldly superficial truth (*saṁvṛti-satya*) and truth from the ultimate [standpoint] (*paramārthatas*). Those who do not discern the

> distinction [between] these two truths do not discern the deep reality in the teaching of the Buddhas. Without resorting to pragmatic truth (*vyavahāra*), the ultimate is not shown; and not arriving at the ultimate [truth], one does not attain nirvana. (24.8-10)

In short, there is no way to enlightenment except through the use of impediments to enlightenment: concepts, which all have their origin in dependency, as we have seen. But this would seem to put us in the same position as that of a psychotherapist trying to convince a paranoiac that no one is really persecuting him, trying to "get inside his mind," etc.--when every "convincing" word of the therapist succeeds only in reinforcing the delusion of this patient that someone is always trying to "get to him." The same sort of vicious circle seems inevitable in Buddhist teaching, since the words used by the Teacher are precisely those "dependable" fabrications fashioned by the clinging consciousness--fodder for the hungry mind to "ruminate." The alternative is apparently to take away the food without starving the person to death, though in this context the correct analogy would be that of finding a way to take a drug addict off of his "dependency" without killing him in the process. The addiction is a morbid and therefore unnecessary psychosomatic condition which seems to be best treated both through the use of gradually diminishing doses of a substitute, non-addicting drug, and through the use of psychotherapy to deal with the psychological aspect of the dependency.

Nagarjuna's approach can perhaps be understood better in the light of such analogies. The "addiction" of the suffering person has to be treated in two stages. First, he must be taken off the damaging dependency which is supplied him by "pragmatic" or conventional ways (*vyāvahārika*) of life: he must become a "Buddhist." His addiction has now been transferred to a more favorable dependency, the doctrines, norms, and conventions of Buddhist tradition. The "cure" is only effected, however, when the patient is taken off even this mild yet always dangerous dependency and becomes in fact, an "ex-Buddhist."[1]

The ultimate truth, then, is in-dependence of all dependencies, including Buddhist ones: Dharma, Tathagata, nirvana, samsara, emptiness, dependent origination, and all the rest without exception. Both the *Prajñāpāramitā* and the *Kārikās* are "handbooks of therapy" not for the secular addict, who contemplates having himself committed to the care and treatment of the Sangha, but for the "partially withdrawn" Buddhist addict, who now must take the final steps of the cure. The two works mentioned, then, are aimed at one thing: making it impossible to depend upon any conceptual and verbal dependency. The *Prajñāpāramitā* employs techniques of paradox to this end, while Nagarjuna utilizes a more formalized method of logical paradox, through which conceptual dependency is undone by using the logic of dependent origination.

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[1] Cf. the Buddha's simile of the Dharma as a raft whose only function is to get one to the other side of a river: MN i.134f.

Throughout all of the *Kārikās* Nagarjuna is quite explicit in linking his methods to the original teaching of the Buddha; for instance:

> Those who teach the togetherhood (i.e., relationship: *satattva*) of self and beings, [or that they exist] separately (unrelated)--I do not consider them skilled in the meaning of the teaching [of the Buddha]. (10.16)
>
> Those who see own-being, derived-being, and non-being--they do not see the reality in the teaching of the Buddha. (15.6)

Here the teaching of the Buddha, the Dharma, is understood to imply, at least from the ultimate standpoint, the refutation of all conventional views and concepts. But by the same token, the Buddhist "teaching devices" (*prajñapti*) themselves must finally be refuted, as the Buddhas themselves warn:

> Emptiness was proclaimed by the Conquerors (*jina*) as the remedy (*niḥsaraṇa*) to all views; but those were declared incurable (*asādhya*) for whom there is a view of emptiness. (13.8)

And it is understood at the same time that *without* the doctrine of emptiness (dependent origination) there could be no "curing" of the afflicted:

> The afflictions (*kleśa*) and (retributive) action are from fabrication (*vikalpa*), they are from verbal-conceptualization (*prapañca*), but verbal-conceptualization is stopped by[1] emptiness. (18.5)

It is this recognition that the ultimate truth is freedom from dependency, including the dependency upon Buddhism, that leads to the statement that the ultimate truth and the "learning" of it are indeed independent of Buddhism and Buddhists:

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[1] Following the alternate reading. See note to my translation.

> When there is no origination of the fully enlightened, and there is a perishing of the disciples, from the non-relation (*asaṁsarga*) of the alone-enlightened (*pratyekabuddha*) comes forth knowledge (*jñāna*). (18.12)

--where "knowledge" refers to the enlightening knowledge of emptiness and the ultimate emptiness of "emptiness."

CHAPTER III

COMMENTARY ON THE KĀRIKĀS

Chapter 1 Pratyaya-parīkṣā: Critique of Conditions[1]

The opening chapter of the MMK is representative of the whole text, utilizing in rapid-fire, "preview" fashion several lines of argument at once, to refute the traditional (Sarvāstivādin) doctrine of necessary causal conditions (*pratyaya*).[2] This is only the first appearance of the concept of causality, a topic which is repeatedly brought under criticism in the course of the rest of the MMK,[3] but its present treatment at the very beginning is most appropriate and in the best paradoxical manner of the *Prajñāpāramitā*. Nagarjuna's work is based, as the Dedication implies, on the doctrine of dependent origination and its implications for all sorts of concept-formation. What better way to begin, then, than with a critical refutation of the concept of dependent origination itself by *means* of the principle of dependent origination?

The chapter begins with the eventual conclusion: that no thing (*bhāva*) can be said to exist *because* of its causal conditions, since there is no own-being of things to be found in the causal conditions which presumably give rise to them, and if there is no own-being in the conditions, there cannot be any derived-being either, since that could only have its source in the own-being of something else.[1] If neither own-being nor derived-being of things can be explained by their causal conditions, neither can it be demonstrated that things originate totally without cause (1, 3).

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[1] MMKV trans. by Theodore Stcherbatsky, *The Conception of Buddhist Nirvāṇa* (Leningrad: Publishing Offices of the Academy of Sciences of USSR, 1927), pp. 83-182. See also Murti, *Central Philosophy*, pp. 166-78.

[2] Cf. AK ii.299ff. See below on vss. 7-10.

[3] Cf. in particular, chaps. 4, 8, 10, 12, 17, 20.

The discussion then becomes more specific. The activity[2] (or "activation": kriyā) which effects a particular result does not itself derive from the conditions, nor does it occur without them; but the conditions themselves do not have the activation of the result within them, though they could not exist without a resultant activation, since when they are together the result is ipso facto there (4). On the other hand, if to get at the matter we retreat to a time prior to the particular set of conditions, we are left with the problem of demonstrating that the particular set can get together at all, since, not yet existing as such, they cannot be said to have any conditions themselves, and would have to arise causelessly (5).

In the same vein, we cannot appeal to the conditions of an already existing result, since they are now irrelevant;

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[1] Cf. chap. 15 for a more detailed analysis of this line of reasoning.

[2] The "resultancy" or emergence of the phenomenon "out of" the totality (sāmagrī) of its causes and conditions. Cf. chaps. 20 and 8.

nor can we speak of the causal conditions of a result which does not as yet exist, since it manifestly *has* none. In particular, the material cause (*nirvartako hetuḥ*) of a sprout, the seed, *no longer* forms a condition due to which there is a sprout, since the sprout is there; but when there is not yet a sprout but only a seed, the seed cannot be said to be the causal condition of an as yet imaginary sprout; and no third alternative is anything but a contradiction in terms (6-7).

The remaining three conditions are disposed of in much the same way as the preceding one, based on the premise of vs. 6. First, a supporting condition (*ālambana*), perhaps in the sense of an objective basis (viz., the actual sprout) for the mental image of a sprout,[1] is irrelevant to the actually existing mental image of the sprout. Further, it is evident that the concept of the cessation of a dharma is invalid since the "origination" of the dharma is unfounded. For this reason, the notion of continuity (*anantara*)--i.e., that the sprout originates only because of the cessation of the seed--is inadmissible; besides which, if the seed *has* ceased to exist, how can it provide a causal condition of continuity between seed and sprout? Finally, a "controlling influence" (or ruling condition: *ādhipateya*)[2]--e.g., the necessary prerequisite for the sprout, the seed itself in this case--is invalidated through its own definition, "this existing, that comes to be,"[1] since the requisite "existing" is inadmissible (8-10).

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[1] Or possibly simply a sustaining condition, such as the water or earth which "support" the sprout.

[2] Each member of the twelve-fold Chain of Dependent Origination might be called an *adhipateya* for the next member.

The general point is thus clear: there is no way to establish a valid relation between the existence of causal conditions and the existence of their effect--the "chariot" is not to be found in the axle, wheels, pins, frame, etc., either individually or collectively, and since it does not exist *in* the parts, it cannot be said to exist *because* of them. There seems to be no way to avoid admitting that the chariot appears without any causal conditions, and in that case, the existence of a chariot cannot be explained any more by axle, wheels, etc., than by snips, snails, and puppy-dogs' tails (11-12)! Finally, it is illegitimate to say that the chariot exists in that it is *made* of its parts--that the parts make a real chariot--since the parts themselves are unexplained: they do not make themselves, but derive from other preceding (and also derivative) causal conditions; i.e., they lack the "real existence" by which they could "make up" a real chariot. Nevertheless, the chariot cannot be explained except by means of its causal conditions; though because it cannot be demonstrated that the chariot is a *result* (*phala*) of the causal conditions, the causes remain without an effect and hence become meaningless (13-14).

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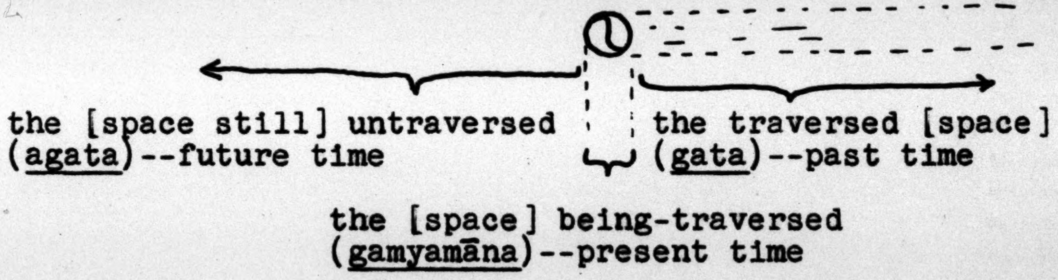
[1] *Asmin sati, idaṁ bhavati*.

Chapter 2 Gatāgatagamyamāna-parīkṣā: Critique of Motion[1]

The chapter on motion presents an elaborate systematic critique of the whole semantic set of terms which would be used to conceptualize any event insofar as movement plays a part in it. It might help clarify the problem if we begin with an actual event and then establish the relevant semantic set. Candrakirti uses the example of a foot walking on the ground, but I prefer the slightly simpler case of a ball thrown through the air. The basic set of terms relates to the flying ball in the following manner:[2]


the [space still] untraversed
(agata)--future time
the traversed [space]
(gata)--past time
the [space] being-traversed
(gamyamāna)--present time

gantṛ - the mover, traverser (the subject of motion: the ball)
gacchati - moves, traverses (the action relative to the subject)
gamyate - moved through, is traversed (the action relative to the object: the trajectory)
gamana, gati - moving, motion, traversing (the action itself)

gantum ārabhyate - begins to move
tiṣṭhati - rests

gati (vss. 22, 23, 25) - a move (the motion as a whole, the whole course of the motion)

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[1] MMKV trans. by Jacques May, Candrakīrti Prasannapadā Madhyamakavṛtti (Paris: Librarie d'Amérique at d'Orient, 1959), pp. 51-77. See also Murti, Central Philosophy, pp. 178-84.

[2] Sanskrit wordbuilding capabilities make it difficult in the extreme to translate in any consistent manner the many terms involved in the Critique of Motion. Suffice to say that the Sanskrit of this chapter is much less awkward than is the translation attempted.

Neither the space already passed through nor that which is yet to be passed through is subject to the moving of the ball. But the space presently being passed through is defined relative to the space before and after and is thus not a third space which could be subject independently to the moving of the ball. Nevertheless, an opponent might assert that the force impelling the ball (*ceṣṭā*) must be located in that space actually being passed through, and thus the moving occurs in that same space. At this point the essential correlativity of the terms is brought out. The concept "space-being-moved-through" presupposes the moving of the body through it: "space-being-moved-through" and "the moving through" of the body are simultaneous concepts. But the situation requires that the space-being-moved-through exist *for* the body to move through it, and this would lead to two possibilities: either the space-being-moved-through is originally free of any moving and is then subjected to it (4), which is a contradiction in terms; or there must be two motions involved, one to allow the space-being-moved-through to be defined as such, and then the moving of the body through that space (5). If the latter alternative is the case, then there must be two movers, since there is no action without an actor, the subject of the action.

If moving implies a mover, so a mover implies moving. A non-mover manifestly does not move, and there is no middle term, so it must be a mover which moves. Of course it is this notion which is refuted by the correlativity dialectic, for the concept "mover" presupposes that of "moving," since a mover apart from its moving would be contradictory. But since it is the mover which, being the mover, then moves, we wind up with two motions: one to define the ball as the mover, and one which is the moving of the ball (7-11). Then, if the analysis were extended, since from verse 6 we found two "movers" appearing, four "motions" would be entailed, and so on in infinite regress.

The emptiness of the abstract terms involved is even more clearly seen in verses 12-14 on the beginning of movement. The moving does not begin in a space already moved through or in a future space yet to be moved through, and since it is only at the inception of motion, it does not begin in a "space-presently-being-moved-through" which would presuppose an already moving body. Thus we find that motion cannot be said to begin in any of the three spatio-temporal phases. But if the beginning of motion cannot be "seen," i.e., conceived (*adṛśyamāna* *ārambhe* *gamanasya*), then there is no basis for such fabrications as space "traversed," "not yet traversed," and "being traversed."

The concept of the mover coming to "rest" is disposed of by the simple expedient of showing that a mover which rests is not a mover, since, by definition, a mover only moves. In verses 18-21 another aspect of correlativity is touched on which is developed in more detail in chapters 10

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and 14, namely, the identity-difference dilemma. If it is said that the mover itself is the moving, an identity of the actor and its action (or, in general, cause and effect) would follow. If, however, they are essentially different, each would exist independently of the other: a mover apart from any moving, the moving unrelated to a mover--both of which are inconceivable.

Finally, in verses 22f., we can consider the "trip" which the ball makes in its flight. The ball is a "mover" only because it makes a specific move from place to place, just as an airplane makes a determinate move in its flight from New York to Chicago. But prior to that flight which allows the plane to be called a "mover" it is not a mover, since it has not made the flight; and as such it ipso facto does not make the flight, since it does not in fact exist as a mover (a "flight")-from-New York-to-Chicago.

Even such an eminent scholar of Buddhism as de La Vallée Poussin was annoyed by the apparent absurdity of such arguments as the above.[1] The absurdity, however, is precisely what the Critique seeks to uncover in the concepts and conceptual sets which it examines. It should again be emphasized that the actual event, a ball thrown by Hans to Fritz, is not in question: from the ultimate standpoint the thrown ball is "unmanifested by verbal expressions, free of fabrication"

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[1] "Une bonne partie de Nāgārjuna est faite d'enfantillages de cette sorte." La Vallée Poussin, MCB, II (1933), 19.

(*prapañcair* *aprapañcitaṁ* *nirvikalpam*).[1] It is only the expressions or fabrications which the Critique shows to be empty; the reality is such as it is, non-conceptual and indescribable. In this connection I feel that Murti's concluding interpretation of the chapter is misleading: "Nagarjuna therefore reaches the conclusion: that motion, mover, and space [the three divisions discussed above] are but appearance."[2] I would say rather that the concepts "motion," "mover," and all the rest are fabrications superimposed[3] upon the real (or phenomenal) world.

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[1] MMK 18.9.

[2] Murti, *Central Philosophy*, p. 183.

[3] *Adhyāropa*; cf. May, *Candrakīrti*, n. 609.

Chapter 3 Cakṣurādīndriyāṇi-parīkṣā: Critique of Sight and the Other Senses[1]

The analysis of motion in chapter 2 is brought to bear on the concept of sense faculties and the objects of their activity. This is one of a group of eight chapters which are aimed at variations on the theme of agent and activity, substance and attribute, or cause and effect in general (viz., chaps. 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, and 14), in each of which the mutual dependency of the concepts involved is made the basis for their refutation.

Here the sense functions are defined at the outset in relative terms as found in the classification of *āyatanas*:

sense (function or instrument)	*domain*
sight	a seeable
hearing	a hearable
tasting	a tasteable
touching	a touchable
smelling	a smellable
mind	dharmas

It is this relational terminology of sensory experiments which is to be refuted, not the experience itself. In other words, it remains experientially the case that "I see John," but the conceptual "grasping" of the reality is empty of reality. The present chapter, we could say, approaches the set of all instances of such sense-experience propositions, and demonstrates the merely verbal relationships between the conventional terms involved, which are shown to be isolated from the reality of sense experience, leaving that reality "free of dependency"[1] i.e., indescribable and unthinkable. Since the terminological relationships are all structurally the same, Nagarjuna need only select one instance for analysis, seeing and seeable, in order to deal with the whole set.

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[1] MMKV trans. in May, *Candrakīrti*, pp. 78-87.

The first step here is to establish the set as well as the fact that the terms of the set are related in a specific manner; for example, "seeing" relates to the object of its activity, the "seeable," just as in chapter 10 "fire" relates to "fuel." The meaning of the terms is bound up with their relational character: "seeing" has no meaning (no own-being) apart from "seeable," and thus it is meaningless to relate one of the terms only to itself (1-2). This being granted, the relation between terms can now be systematically refuted, in exactly the same way that the set of motion terms is refuted (or isolated). With minor adjustments the vocabulary of "seeing" can be substituted for that of "going," and the arguments of chapter 2 can be repeated for "seeing," "hearing," and the rest. The results are summarized in verses 4-6:

There can only be "sight" (*darśanam*) when there is an actual act of seeing-in-process (*paśyamānam*). But to say that it is "sight" *which* *sees* is to create an inapplicable (*na* *yujyate*) split between the agent and its activity. As in chap. 2.3-5, two seeings would be entailed: that by virtue

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[1] Cf. the definition of nirvana at MMK 25.9.

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of which sight is so-called, and the act of seeing which sight performs (darśanaṁ paśyati)--and this implies a sight which is prior to the act of seeing, whereas they are logically simultaneous. Of course, if "sight sees" is inadmissible, "non-sight sees" is doubly absurd.

The "seer" fares no better, since it depends upon the concept "sight." We can paraphrase chap. 2.7-11 and simply substitute the appropriate terms:

> If the seer is set aside, sight does not occur; sight not existing, then whence would there be a seer? The seer does not see, just as a non-seer does not see, and other than a seer and a non-seer, what third [alternative] sees? "Insofar as [there is] a seer, he sees"--just how will this occur, when a seer without seeing does not occur? The opinion, "the seer sees," of him who, desiring the sight of the seer, entails a seer without [his] seeing. Moreover, two sights follow if the seer sees--that by which he is called a seer, and that which, being a seer, [then] sees.

There can be no "seer" apart from "sight," but no more can there be a "seer" not apart from "sight," since otherwise they would be identical. "Seer" is not capable of reality--it is empty--and so the terms "seeable," and "sight," dependent in turn on "seer," are likewise void.

In passing, Nagarjuna does away with the traditional twelve-fold chain of dependent origination (the nidāna), since without sight and seeable, no "contact" (sparśa) between them is conceivable, with the result that no "feeling" (vedanā) can arise, and hence no "thirst" (tṛṣṇā), "clinging" (upādāna), and the rest.

Chapter 4 Skandha-parīkṣā: Critique of the Aggregates[1]

Here is one of the simplest examples of the mutual-dependency argument as well as the first chapter to bring up the term "emptiness." The whole argument requires only 6 verses and is specifically presented by the author as an example of the refutation by emptiness (*parihāraṁ śūnyatayā*). The particular concept selected for refutation is ostensibly the traditional classification of the 5 aggregates, but the theme actually is causality. Causality is here attacked at the basic semantic level of definition of the terms "cause" and "effect." The concept "cause-of-form" (*rūpakāraṇa*) entails the concept "form." Conversely, if there is no "form," there can be no "cause-of-form." If there were a form without there being simultaneously a cause-of-form, then, there would be a causeless effect. Similarly, if there could be a cause-of-form without a simultaneously existing form, there would be an effectless cause. But both of these are contradictions of the definitions involved, for on the premises of a doctrine of causality, there is nothing without a cause, and there can be no "cause" without an "effect." Now if the effect already exists, since cause logically is prior to effect, the cause is no longer present. If, however, there exists no effect, then the cause of the effect is obviously not present either. But there is no "effect" without a

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[1] MMKV trans. in May, *Candrakīrti*, pp. 88-96.

"cause." The conclusion is reached at this point: "Thus one should not fabricate _any_ fabrications relating to form [the particular 'effect' here]," since the fabricated concepts were shown not to apply to reality, viz., actual forms (5).

The concepts, cause and effect, were shown to be mutually dependent in a logical sense--empty of independent meaning (i.e., of their own conceptual "being"). But physical reality does not show this kind of simultaneous existence of a form and a cause-of-the-form. Such is the method (_krama_) of the refutation by emptiness, we are told, which should be applied to all _vikalpa_ about "beings."

Chapter 5 Dhātu-parīkṣā: Critique of the Elements[1]

In the Critique of the six elements[2] the relational set is that of substance and attribute, as expressed by the terms "characterizable" or "qualifiable" (*lakṣya*), the subject, and its "character" or "qualities" (*lakṣaṇa*). Anything might serve as an instance--a ball and its roundness, for example--but here as so often in the MMK the refutation is directed at a specific conventional Buddhist dharma-classification, the six *dhātu* scheme. "Space" and its basic differentium, "non-obstruction" (*anāvaraṇa*)[3] are selected as the doomed representatives of *lakṣya* and *lakṣaṇa*. The structure of the argument is very close to that of the immediately preceding chapters 3 and 4.

"Space," the substance, is meaningless without its simultaneous attribute, "non-obstruction." If it existed prior to its attribute it would not have the attribute which defines its nature: if there is a substance, then it must have attributes. Now this attribute is not brought about by a prior-existing attributeless substance (the roundness of a round ball does not derive from an as yet non-round ball), nor is it brought about by the substance possessed of attributes (the roundness of a round ball does not derive from an already round ball), and there is no other possibility. The substance to be characterized cannot be demonstrated, since that would require the attribute or character to be already present; and the character cannot be demonstrated unless that which is characterized is present. "Character" and "characterizable" (or "substance" and "attribute") are conceptual fabrications, undemonstrable abstractions. It may be experientially the case that I have a ball, but when I conceptually approach the ball I fabricate a "ball" which "possesses roundness"; the ball becomes that which is qualified by its roundness, while the roundness has the ball as its subject or substrate. All of this or similar *vikalpa*, fabrication, is isolated from the real ball. The chapter concludes, in a paroxysm of paradox: those unenlightened people who "see" real existence (*astitva*: *bhāva*, *svabhāva*) and its opposite, non-existence, are unable to "see" the reality of space (or a ball), since that would require that relinquishing of the sort of clinging vision (*darśana*) which fabricates what it sees (*draṣṭavya*).[1]

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[1] MMKV trans. in Stanislaw Schayer, *Ausgewählte Kapitel aus der Prasannapadā* (Krakow, 1931).

[2] Fire, water, earth, air, space, and consciousness; cf. Murti, *Central Philosophy*, p. 189.

[3] Cf. MMKV 129.9.

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[1] Murti's interpretation of this verse is quite different: "Those that affirm the existence of things or deny their existence (the men of little wisdom), they do not perceive the ultimate truth that is the benign cessation (of the world)." Murti, *Central Philosophy*, p. 191.

Chapter 6 Rāgarakta-parīkṣā: Critique of Passion and the Impassioned[1]

The problem of logical simultaneity versus phenomenal non-simultaneity is the specific topic of chapter 6. Here, as in the preceding chapter, the refutation is directed at a variation on the subject-attribute theme, in this case "passion" (*rāga*) as a condition, and the subject in that condition, the "impassioned" (*rakta*).

Verses 1 and 2 repeat the familiar objections based on logical simultaneity. Assuming the priority of either the affected subject (*rakta*) or the affection affecting him (*rāga*), the usual quandary is inescapable. There would be an affected subject existing with no affection present, no affected subject and yet the affection present, an affection existing with no affected subject present, or no affection yet the affected subject present--all of which possibilities are absurd. The definitions demand simultaneity (*sahabhāva*) of affection and the affected subject.

All attempts to demonstrate this simultaneity, however, result in more absurdity. An affection and affected subject do not appear simultaneously, for this would presuppose their separate existence: roundness and a ball do not appear as two independent things jointly coming to be; they appear as a unity (3).

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[1] MMKV trans. in May, *Candrakīrti*, pp. 97-105.

But if there is unity (ekatva), then the concept of simultaneity is pointless, since something does not exist "jointly with itself" (na tenaiva hi tat saha); there would be nothing with which to be simultaneous (sahāya). On the other hand, if there is real disparateness (pṛthaktva), simultaneity would entail a conjunction of things which could exist unrelated and independent, each of which would have nothing with which it was necessarily simultaneous (sahāya) (4-5). But affection and affected subject are conceptually dependent and cannot exist in disparateness, and if they were capable of disparate existence, they would not be simultaneous, which they must be by definition. In order, therefore, to establish disparate existence, simultaneity has to be denied, but simultaneity cannot be established without there being disparates which are simultaneous. The notion of simultaneity is itself empty and conceptually dependent upon disparateness--they are both vikalpa, just as are affected subject and affection or ball and roundness (6-10).

Chapter 7 Saṁskṛta-parīkṣā: Critique of the Composite[1]

The present chapter is not so much concerned with the concept "composite" in itself, but rather with the attribution of origination, duration, and destruction (utpādasthitibhañga) to composites.[2] As Murti points out,[3] it is neither "possible nor profitable" for us to determine which particular Hinayanist doctrine of the saṁskṛtalakṣaṇas is in Nagarjuna's mind, since all of the major sects seem to have made use of the basic notion[4] of the origin, duration, and the disappearance of all dharmas.

As with the various discussions of causality, Nagarjuna's attack is carried out at the basic semantic level of demonstrating that the topic--origination and destruction, or causality--cannot even be legitimately formulated in conceptual terms, so that the scholastic subtleties in the arguments of Sarvastivadin with Sautrantika on such topics are totally irrelevant--from the ultimate standpoint, of course. Since the Buddha did teach the doctrine of three saṁskṛtalakṣaṇas, it must have validity as a pragmatic truth; but as the purpose of pragmatic truth in the teaching of the enlightened[5] is to lead one to the ultimate truth, the abhidharmika's elaborations on the pragmatic truth of the Buddha is ultimately unedifying.

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[1] MMKV trans. in May, Candrakīrti, pp. 106-42.

[2] Cf. AK ii.222ff.

[3] Murti, Central Philosophy, p. 192.

[4] As found, for example, in AN 1.152: uppāda, vaya, thitassa aññathatta.

[5] Cf. MMK 24.10.

The method of the critique is to apply the concept of the three characteristics of composites to the three characteristics themselves, since, if they are non-composites, they could not be characteristics of the composite, for the non-composites,[1] nirvana and space, are devoid of characteristics. We are immediately faced with the problem of logical simultaneity: the three characteristics are supposed to be sequential,[2] leaving us with each of the three unrelated to the other two during the time in which each is characteristic of a composite; on the other hand the three cannot be simultaneously the characteristic of a composite, since they are logically opposed to each other. If this is not difficulty enough, we are also faced with a hopeless regress (anavasthā) if the three are composite, for each one must have the three characteristics, each of which must also have them, and so on (1-3).

These initial considerations are amplified through the rest of the chapter, the first dealing with being the regress argument (4-13), against which the only reply could be that there is not a regress: that origination is self-originating and therefore the regress stops with the origination of origination. A self-originating origination means that the initial originating (*maulotpāda*) is produced simply by origination, and that origination is brought about simply by the initial originating. In refutation, Nagarjuna first points out the difficulty of a dual set of terms such as "origination of origination" which produces "initial originating" (which is the origin of the origination of origination): each necessitates the other a priori but each is the a priori of the other (4-6). The only alternative would be for the initial originating process, which results in the origination of origination, to originate itself simultaneously by virtue of originating, just as a lamp lights up not only other dark objects but also itself simultaneously, simply by virtue of its lighting up. But again the dual set of terms is fatal, as Nagarjuna shows by dissecting the analogy. Dark and light are unrelatable: if there is light, then there is no darkness *for* it to illuminate; how could light affect the darkness when the light, when it originates, never encounters darkness. But if the darkness is destroyed without having been so contacted by the light, there is manifestly no causal relation between the two; finally, if it makes sense to say that the light illuminates itself, it should make sense to say that darkness obscures itself, i.e. makes itself invisible, which is absurd (8-12).

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[1] Assuming a Sarvastivadin point of view.

[2] Whether they refer to a momentary dharma or a series (saṁtāna) of dharmas; cf. AK ii.226.

Apart from the light-dark analogy, if something has not yet originated it could not originate itself, and if it already has originated, there is no need for it to originate itself--here is the motion formula applied once more (13-14).

On a more general level yet, we cannot talk about something's "origination" while it is only *in process* of originating, and not yet originated, since until there is something originated there has been no event (i.e., *utpatti*) called "the origination of such-and-such." So we cannot say that something is originating due to (*pratītya*) its participation in an origination which can be specified as such only after the fact. Besides, if the thing originating and the origination of it *are* mutually dependent, they are empty of own-being--"quieted" by nature (15-16).

The rest of the chapter applies the techniques already employed in the first half to the duration and cessation of a composite. The conclusion, of course, is that since the three characteristics are untenable because of their logical mutual dependency yet existential incompatability, the concept of a composite is emptied of any ultimate truth, since it depends upon the three characteristics--which are empty *vikalpa*, illusory mental superimpositions (33-34).

Chapter 8 Karmakāraka-parīkṣā: Critique of Action and Actor[1]

In the consideration of the relation between an agent and his act we are faced with a problem similar to that of chapter 6, and also to the critique of (retributive) action and its fruit in chapter 17. Here, instead of focussing immediately upon the more specifically Buddhist problem of retributive karma, the semantic set of action terms in general is first scrutinized: the agent (*kāraka*) or cause (*kāraṇa*); his efficient activity (*kriyā*); the instrument of his acting (*karaṇa*); and the result of his activity, the act (*karma*) or intended effect (*kārya*).

We see immediately that such a set implies a sequence as well as the simultaneous correlativity of the terms, and it is this two-fold aspect which is seized upon from the start. If the resultant act of the agent already exists, no simultaneously existing cause (i.e., the agent) of it is now required to "do" the action. But if the act does not yet exist, it has also as yet no agent, and it is meaningless to speak of a non-existent agent accomplishing an equally non-existent act (1). The act, otherwise stated, is "beyond" the activity which was required to effect it, and hence exists as an act, now, independent of an actor; while the actor, who is engaged in activity is unrelated to the resultant act, since it is beyond that effecting activity. We are left then with an unexplained (i.e., causeless) existent act, just as we would be if an as yet non-existent act were effected by a therefore as yet non-existent actor (who *is* not a cause until he acts) (2-3).

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[1] MMKV trans. in May, *Candrakīrti*, pp. 143-57.

Once it is demonstrated that the cause of an action cannot be established, all the rest of the set of (pragmatically) related terms lose their validity. The consequences are devastating to conventional Buddhist teaching; for if it is admitted by the latter that acts either "exist" or "do not (yet) exist," it follows that "fruits" of action, being causeless, cannot be justified, and hence there can be no eventual enlightenment or even merited rebirth in a heaven--all activity whatsoever would be rendered pointless (4-6). The next few verses (7-11) elaborate on the various other combinations of existing or non-existent agents and acts, though the point cannot really be improved upon.

There is no way to escape the premise of correlativity: agent and act depend upon each other for their "existence," yet each must already exist for the other to depend upon--a hopelessly vicious circle, as is the case with any other set of concepts, all of which are in inescapable "bondage" because of their dependency (*upādāna*) (12-13)!

Chapter 9 Pūrva-parīkṣā: Critique of Priority[1]

A special case of the simultaneity problem[2] is that of what in Vedantic terms would be called the "enjoyer" (*bhoktṛ*) of sense-experience. In broader terms, the notion at issue here is an agent with multiple activities, each of which exists apparently relative to the same unifying subject.

As in preceding chapters, the conceptual simultaneity of the main terms is first brought out. A subject prior to its attributes (here the sense-faculties) is therefore attributeless. Being without attributes it is unmanifest (*na ajyate*) and thus incapable of being indicated (or designated: *na prajñapyate*),[3] as chapter 5 has already made clear. Were the subject proved to exist prior to the faculties, moreover, the latter would also have to exist independently of the subject, which is inconceivable (3-5).

It might be said that no single subject is manifested by the sense-faculties as a manifold; instead it is manifested by the functioning of a particular sense at a particular time. But this leads to a single subject which would exist prior to each sense-function--thus changing its nature constantly. Here we have, say, an act of seeing whose agent is not only seer but hearer, taster, etc., simultaneously, but as was established by the analysis of chapter 3, no sight exists

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[1] MMKV trans. in May, *Candrakīrti*, pp. 158-68.

[2] Cf. chap. 6.

[3] Cf. May, *Candrakīrti*, n. 489.

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apart from the act of seeing and no seer apart from sight (6-8). The only other alternative is to say that since there is no seer apart from the act of seeing, the agent of each faculty must be discrete, and this would lead to a plurality of selves (9).

Finally, if we consider the material causal conditions out of which the sense faculties are derived, in an effort to find the subject which supposedly exists prior to the faculties, we can find nothing of the kind among those material elements.[1] If then the concept of a real and independent subject cannot be established, the concepts of seeing, hearing, etc., cannot be validated any more successfully, since they depend upon the "prior" concepts of seer, hearer, etc. And with the vanishing of those notions also disappear all other fabrications based upon the premise of "is-ness" and "is-notness" (i.e., own-being and its annihilation, origination and destruction) (10-12).

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[1] Cf. MMK 1.11.

Chapter 10 Agnīndhana-parīkṣā: Critique of Fire and Fuel[1]

The relation between fire and fuel is treated as a special instance of cause and effect. There is no way of substantiating the relation between the terms and therefore the terms are empty of real validity, since their relation would be fundamental to their validity.

If the fire is just the fuel itself, cause and effect (or the agent and its action) would be identical, thus obliterating the necessary distinctions.

If the fire is other than the fuel, it will have all of the attributes which independent existence (*nirapekṣatva*) entails; viz., it would exist in itself, by its own power, and would by definition exist independently of fuel, nor would it require being brought into existence by some external agency, nor would it ever go out, since it exists by nature (*svabhāvena*, *prakṛtyā*).[2]

If the fire is other than the fuel, there is a disjunction between them (*aprāpta*). Hence, the fire will not burn the fuel; not utilizing the fuel it will not exhaust it and go out, but will remain always with its own immutable characteristics (*svaliñgavan*).

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[1] MMKV trans. in Stanislaw Schayer, "Feuer und Brennstoff," *Rocznik Orientalistyczny*, VII (1931), 26-52.

[2] Notice, as usual, the excluded middle. If there should be an attempt to evade this by defining the fuel as that which is being burned (*idhyamāna*), therefore apparently including necessarily the notion of fire, one would still be left with the question, "Since something becomes 'fuel' only insofar as it is burning, by what means is it made to become such?" The fire must be other than the fuel.

A contact between fire and fuel would be possible, on the other hand, if they exist separately, as a man and a woman might take hold of each other. Now by definition fire depends upon fuel and fuel, qua fuel, depends upon the fire which uses it up. The concepts are only simultaneously and relatively meaningful--neither is prior to the other. If you say that a fire depends upon fuel which exists prior to the fire, the objection is that "fuel" implies "fire," and thus there must already be a fire in effect for there to be any fuel. And if fuel is prior to the fire, moreover, the fuel would be free of fire, which contradicts the definition of "fuel." At this point there is a general statement on dependent relationships and their inapplicability to reality:

> That being which is brought about (*sidhyate*) dependently, brings itself about dependent upon something; if that which is to be depended upon has [yet] to be brought about, what is dependent upon what? (10)

The specific conclusion in this instance is that no actual mutual dependence or independence of fire and fuel can be demonstrated by argumentation, which, necessarily, must make use of the concepts "fire" and "fuel." But application of the analysis by dependent origination shows the essential emptiness of the concepts as soon as they are allowed any intrinsic validity (i.e., own-being). The general conclusion is that any concept of relationship between dharmas, whether dependent or independent, is contrary to the "teaching," namely, that of the Buddha.

Chapter 11 Pūrvāparakoṭi-parīkṣā: Critique of the Extent of Past and Future[1]

This is a very simple minor critique which raises in succinct form the problem of simultaneity-sequentiality which other chapters develop at length. The topic here is samsara, conceived of as an endless series of repeated births and deaths. The logical mutual dependency of these terms makes their phenomenal sequentiality impossible: a birth existing before death would have to exist independently of death, and this would entail the immortality of whatever was born. On the other hand, to begin with a death followed by a new birth would leave us with a "death" not dependent on a prior fact of birth, and hence totally meaningless. To bring the logical simultaneity of the concepts together with their phenomenal separation, however, would lead to a simultaneous being-born-and-dying, neither of which would have its opposite as its prior causal condition, leaving them both inexplicable and contradictory.

The general conclusion is that since the sequential notions of before and after contradict the necessity of mutual relation in logical simultaneity, not only are such temporally sequential concepts as birth and death unviable, but equally so are such logically sequential concepts, treated in earlier chapters, as cause-effect, substance-attribute, and agent-activity. Samsara, as a concept based on the repetitive sequence of a state of affairs, is then manifestly incapable of validation; the concept of nirvana will fare no better in later chapters.

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[1] MMKV trans. in May, Candrakīrti, pp. 169-78.

Chapter 12 Duḥkha-parīkṣā: Critique of Suffering[1]

Suffering and its cause present an instance of the causality problem which recalls the approach of chapter 1. We are given a fourfold possibility that suffering is caused by oneself, by someone else, by both, or that it is without cause--each of which is to be disproved. First, suffering cannot be said to be caused in the present by oneself, since that would give it an independence which "oneself," qua *skandhas*, does not have, since the latter arise dependent upon the series of past *skandhas*. Moreover, to say that I cause my own suffering would be to postulate a personality free of suffering which *then* causes its own suffering, and this would leave us with a problem worse than the original one (2, 4).

On the other hand, if I say that the suffering came to me from my past *skandhas* and is thus other-made, I face the same problem, for I now postulate a present personality which then receives its suffering from the past (5); and this is not to mention the fact that I have covertly asserted a past personality free of suffering which then causes the suffering which comes to me in the present (6). We are obviously in the familiar quandary[2] of trying to relate an existent agent (*pudgala*, *skandhas*) with an existing activity (suffering).

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[1] MMKV trans. in Schayer, *Ausgewählte Kapitel*.

[2] Cf. chaps. 6 and 8.

The problem can be approached in even simpler form. Suffering is clearly not made by oneself in independence of one's past "existence." To say that suffering is then made by "another," i.e., prior, self, is simply to assert that suffering was self-made in the past, and this has already been disallowed. The problem cannot be evaded by claiming that suffering is partially caused by one's present self and partially the result of the past personality-series, since the cause of suffering would have to be established for the past and then for the present consecutively--with the same difficulties as before. Finally, the fourth possibility presents us with a causeless suffering, a notion which would reduce Buddhism to irrelevance if it had any meaning at all (7-9). The final verse, recalling MMK 1.1, generalizes the critique to apply to any case which can be expressed in terms of the four-fold set of logical possibilities, viz., self-derived, other-derived, both, or neither.

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Chapter 13 Saṁskāra-parīkṣā: Critique of Formations[1]

This chapter must be juxtaposed with chapter 24, in which emptiness is made the premise of the intelligibility of the pragmatic world. In the present chapter the concept of emptiness itself is brought into question.

It begins with an allusion to a passage in the Majjhima Nikāya (iii.245) in which Gautama speaks of the falsity of all saṁskāras (here in the sense of saṁkskṛta, a composite or conditioned entity) since they are "theft-natured"[2] (moṣadharma): the flame of a lamp is something that occurs only through dependent origination; i.e., the flame has a reality "borrowed" from lamp, oil, wick, etc., and has no reality of its own (svabhāva, to use the later term). Similarly, Milinda's chariot "steals" reality from its component parts; it is, in colloquial language, thoroughly "phoney." The immediate question to be asked, however, is: "What is it that is stolen if everything has only dependent, derivative, borrowed reality? The totality of things constitutes a universal den of ontological thieves Where does the loot come from? As chapter 15 shows, the notion of a derivative being is insubstantial, since it assumes the own-being of that which is to be derived. The question is brushed aside however, with the remark that the statement by Gautama was not intended as an (ultimate) truth, and hence a legitimate target for refutation; it was a teaching device to indicate (*prajñapti*; here the term is *paridīpaka*, "illuminant") the concept of emptiness (1-2).

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[1] MMKV trans. in Schayer, Ausgewählte Kapitel.

[2] This interpretation is perhaps preferable to the more ambiguous "characterized by deception" of my Translation.

Emptiness is then explained in terms more or less in line with chapter 24. Because we see that things are subject to change and modification, they cannot have own-being, which would render them fixed and unalterable. If something does not have its own being, it cannot be said to "exist" at all (except deceptively, like a thief), and hence it is called "empty."

Instead of resting content with this explanation, however, we are shifted immediately to the level of ultimate truth and shown the thievery of the concept "emptiness." For the concepts used in the preceding explanation are thieves which have nothing to steal--their meanings are void: if there is no own-being, we cannot speak of *something which* changes, any more than we could if there *were* own-being. Change, "becoming otherwise," does not apply to a youth, since in *being* a youth he cannot be simultaneously aging; and it does not apply to an old man, since he *is* old and thus also is not aging. "Change" is then itself mere fabrication, and the "seeing of change" (13.3a) turns out to be a fabricated "view" (*dṛṣṭi*). Furthermore, if there were a "becoming other" of something, we would encounter two equally absurd states of

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affairs. If milk, for instance, in being milk were "changing into curds," milk and curds would then have to be the same thing, since the change must be of (i.e., of the nature of) the milk. On the other hand, if curds is a having-become-other of the milk, then each must have its own nature and be able to exist independently of the other. In this case there would be no necessary relation between milk and curds, with the result that milk could become anything, and curds could be the product of anything besides milk[1] (3-6).

A final consideration is that the terms "empty" and "non-empty" are correlative in the first place, so if there is nothing which can be said to be non-empty, not term "empty" cannot really apply to anything. "Emptiness" is a useful (i.e. pragmatic: vyāvahārika) teaching device, as chapter 24 says,[2] but when emptiness is mis-taken ("stolen") for ultimate truth, the thief (the clinging consciousness) is indeed incorrigible (asādhya).

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[1] Cf. the analogous case of light and dark in MMK 7.11.

[2] MMK 24.18.

Chapter 14 Saṁsarga-parīkṣā: Critique of Relation[1]

The relational dependency of concepts provides in itself a critique of relation in general which could stand as a summary statement of the whole principle of emptiness as conceptual correlativity. This is simply an abbreviated statement of the conclusions to chapters 6 and 10: "Thus there is no proof of 'passion' either with (i.e., joint being, *sahabhāva*) or without (i.e., separate being, *pṛthagbhāva*) the impassioned; as with passion, [there is] no proof of any dharmas as [being] joint or separate" (6.10). "Those who teach the togetherhood (*satattva*) of self and beings [or that they exist] separately, I do not consider them skilled in the meaning of the teaching" (10.16).

We are first reminded of the topics of chapter 3 (seeing and the rest of the *āyatanas*) and chapter 6 (passion and the other *kleśas*). In these chapters, as well as in chapter 10--among others--the crux of the argument is the impossibility of establishing valid logical relationships between "real" entities. Here this point of view is reasserted, with the addition of "relation" itself to the unending list of empty concepts.

Relation entails the existence of relatable entities which are capable of mutual relationship by virtue of their non-identity--relation must be of one entity with something

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[1] MMKV trans. in Schayer, *Ausgewählte Kapitel*.

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other, and for something to be "other" requires that there be something else to which it is an "other" (5). But this necessary mutual dependency of entities other to each other, simultaneously entails the separate existence of the entities, or else they could not be others; and if the entity exists by itself, then it is not an "other"--no relation inheres in the entity to make it an other independently of other entities, and hence no relation can be derived from anything. The distinction between something and something other than it is entirely fictive (6-7).

It seems to me that this argument is really quite simple, in spite of the tortured language through which it is expressed. We would speak of the foot that kicks a ball as related to the ball in an obviously effective way; and this relationship is made possible only because the foot and the ball are not identical but specifically "other" in distinction from each other. But they are "other" only through their mutually dependent relationship; in themselves they have no "otherness" by virtue of which they are then capable of becoming related to other things. It is manifestly pure abstraction to speak of the ball as being "other than a hand," "other than a cow," ad infinitum.[1] But it is equally simply a fabrication to apply the more immediately "useful" notion that the ball is other than (and hence "is" related to) the foot which kicks it.

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[1] One thinks of Hume, who would say, I imagine, that compelling though it may appear, the inference of a necessary causal relation between the foot and the ball is simply the result of a mental habit, which will never provide a valid logical demonstration of the relationship.

Chapter 15 Svabhāva-parīkṣā: Critique of Own-being[1]

Halfway through the text, but logically belonging close to the beginning of the whole MMK, is a critique directed specifically at the concept of own-being, though of course it has been own-being in one form or another which has been the target since chapter 1. The argument is by now familiar. The concept of self-existence or own-being means, by definition, that whatever possesses its own being exists of and through itself alone, independent and underivative (15.2): it is senseless to say that something self-existent arises from any kind of causal conditions. Thus causal conditions do not result in own-being, but no more do they result in derived being (or dependent existence, *parabhāva*), since the latter term means only own-being which is derived from something else. Neither "own-being" nor "derived being" are valid concepts, and so the concept of "being" itself is shown to be invalid, since there is no third possibility. But then the concept "non-being" is also invalid, since its meaning depends on that of the concept "being."

This can be summarized in a more straightforward fashion: if anything has arisen in the world as a result of causal conditions, it cannot be said to possess own-being, derived being, or being in any sense. If things are seen in terms of "being" and "non-being," then reality is not seen as it is by the clear-sighted (*vicakṣaṇa*) who grasp the teaching of the Buddha. Instead are seen the two *views* based on the premise of own-being: eternalism, which claims "there exists something (viz., a dharma, or a self) through its own being, and it does not *not* exist"--or annihilationism, which claims that there did exist something, but it ceased to exist.

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[1] MMKV trans. in Schayer, *Ausgewählte Kapitel*.

Chapter 16 Bandhanamokṣa-parīkṣā: Critique of Bondage and Release[1]

Indispensable to any type of Buddhism are the basic notions of bondage in the samsara and release through nirvana --these are axiomatic to any understanding of Buddhism or to any teaching of the Way. It appears perverse of Nagarjuna to abolish these essential doctrines, calling them just *vikalpa*,[2] for in doing so he is abolishing Buddhism and reducing it to a mere fiction. This of course is precisely Nagarjuna's intention, which must be understood--as always--in the context of the two-truths doctrine as expressed in chap. 24.8ff. It is is presumed that those who would form the audience of the MMK are Buddhists to begin with, albeit "conventional" (*vyāvahārika*) Buddhists, whether these be considered Hinayana or Mahayana by tradition. Already in possession of the concealing truth of Buddhist instruction, they are presented with ultimate truth, which unconceals reality, which is free of the concepts "samsara" and "nirvana" and all that they imply. Chapter 25 approaches this task by emptying the concept of nirvana itself of any valid meaning; the present chapter aims at disposing of the ideas of bondage and release to achieve the same end, since without them the concept of nirvana has no meaning.

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[1] MMKV trans. in Schayer, *Ausgewählte Kapitel*.

[2] 16.10b.

No matter what the terms of conceiving the process, transmigration (*saṁsāra*) requires a transmigrating subject; bondage and release must be *of* something, whether that something is the personal continuity (*saṁtāna*) due to the *saṁskāras* (formative trends), or a discrete "being" (*sattva*). It is sufficient to use the traditional method of showing the absence of a permanent self or "person" (*pudgala*) within or apart from the *skandhas* (2).[1] On the other hand, if there is transmigration, it must involve leaving behind the old set of supporting skandhas (i.e., *upādāna* as the "fuel" depended upon for subsistence) and moving to a newly constituted set; but this would entail both destruction of the person and, while "in transit," a transmigrator who is free of dependency (*anupādāna*, free of clinging and its sustenance)--both of which would terminate the process of transmigration (3).

If samsara is a concept of doubtful validity, nirvana is equally so; it cannot be demonstrated that *saṁskāras* or "beings" either become bound (i.e., enter the samsara) or become unbound (i.e., attain nirvana) (4-5). To show this, Nagarjuna raises the familiar arguments from simultaneity. Bondage is the state of dependency. If I am already depending, I cannot become bound. On the other hand, to say that when I started depending I then became bound, would be to assert a time when I was free of dependency--but I would not then have become bound. This renders the concept "becomes bound"

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[1] As at MMK 22.1.

(*badhyate*) unintelligible, for no condition can be shown which undergoes the process (6).[1] From another standpoint, if I appeal to the manifest state of bondage as sufficient to say that bondage is what binds me (i.e., depending is what makes me depend), then I am faced with a state of bondage which must logically exist prior to the entity to be bound--but there can be no bondage without there being something in bondage (7). Finally the correlativity of bondage and release makes it impossible to say that I "become released." Bondage and release are logical opposites, so there can be no release of the bound. Nor can it be said that the unbound becomes released, since "release" entails a prior bondage. Bondage and release are supposed to be sequential occurrences, yet logically they are simultaneous, correlative concepts. To say that what is in bondage is in process of becoming released, and thus make them simultaneous occurrences, however, would make them not correlative but identical, since they refer to the same entity--and this result is a contradiction in terms (8).

"Bondage," "release," "samsara," and "nirvana" are fabricated concepts, isolated from reality. And so is, then, the thought of enlightenment itself (*bodhicitta*), the goal of any Buddhist--the desire to "attain nirvana, [and be] free of clinging" is in itself the clinging to a fabrication.

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[1] In other words, there is no determinable subject for the predicate, "becomes bound."

Enlightenment, the state of nirvana, is only "attained" when there is no fabrication of such concepts as "attaining nirvana" and "release from samsara" (9-10).

Chapter 17 Karmaphala-parīkṣā: Critique of Action and Fruit[1]

The present chapter is unusual in that about half of its 33 verses are devoted to an exposition of *abhidharma* theories on the nature of retributive action (*karma*), its relation to the temporal continuity of personality (*saṁtāna*), and the means by which it is to be eliminated. There are two *abhidharma* positions raised, the first (1-11) along Sarvāstivāda[2] lines, and the other (12-20) apparently representing the Vātsiputrīya-Saṁmatīya viewpoint.[3] The details of these 20 verses are quite involved and, in the latter case, problematic in their interpretation, though for our purposes it is not necessary here to analyze the two positions.[4] Indeed, the critique, from verses 21 on, does not refute the details of the preceding expositions, but rather approaches the whole matter in much more general terms--terms which have to be assumed in *any* discussion of the doctrine of *karma*.

The relation of the fruit of action to the action itself is analyzed in terms of the doctrine of no own-being. Action must be without own-being or it will be eternal, unchanging, and most significantly, un-done (or uncaused:

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[1] MMKV trans. in Étienne Lamotte, "Le Traité de l'acte de Vasubandhu, Karmasiddhiprakaraṇa," MCB, IV (1936), 265-88.

[2] Cf. AK iv.1ff.

[3] Cf. Étienne Lamotte, *Histoire du Bouddhisme indien: Des origines à l'ère Śaka* (Louvain, 1958), pp. 674 f.

[4] For an analysis of them, cf. Lamotte, MCB, IV (1936), 151-288.

akṛta), since what exists in itself cannot be effected or affected. This leaves us with an un-done action. But if our future state is determined by what we have not done, then we face the possibility of suffering the results of acts which we have not committed, and this would render meaningless any conventional morality whatever. Moreover, the "payment" for acts would be equally eternal, since if the act has born its fruit, it must continue to do so, since its nature is unalterable (21-25).

As chaps. 6 and 23 demonstrate, the kleśas--desire and hate, and delusion--due to which there is retributive karma, cannot be validly demonstrated, and thus neither can their effect, the karma which leads to rebirth and a new body (26-27). Nonetheless, it might be objected that the ignorant, clinging person is manifestly suffering the effects of his past ignorant clinging. The effect of his past action continues, though the action itself is finished, and so he experiences the working out of his having been the doer of the act in the past. But such a notion as this one of an "enjoyer" of the fruits engendered by having once been an "actor"--this falls down as soon as the mutual dependence of the concepts "action" and "actor" is pointed out. If the act cannot be discovered "existing in its prior causal conditions nor "existing" independently and apart from those conditions,[1] then no "doer" of the act can be found either (28-30). The concept "actor" is a fabrication of thought, a fabrication which in turn entails the concept "action," which it necessarily implies, just as an illusory man will carry out illusory acts which are dependent upon his being the "actor," though they are no more real than is he.

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[1] Cf. MMK 20.1ff.

Chapter 18 Ātma-parīkṣā: Critique of Self[1]

A refutation of the concept "self" in the MMK would seem to be unnecessary, considering that the denial of a substantive self is a basic Buddhist doctrine. Indeed, the argument here is brief and carried out in simple, pragmatic-truth terms. The self cannot be identical with the *skandhas* since the latter are essentially impermanent, yet if the self is different from the *skandhas*, it would lose its defining attributes (1).

Nagarjuna does not employ an elaborate dialectic refutation in the chapter--the concept "self" does not require it. It should be noted that the doctrine of the *skandhas* has already been refuted from the ultimate standpoint in chapter 4. Instead, the traditional refutation of the self is made the basis for a discussion of the nature of clinging and its relation to reality.

If "self" is a fiction, then of course "belonging-to-a-self" (*ātmīya*) is equally a fiction. Because these two fabrications are thus pacified (*śamād ātmātmanīyayoḥ*),[2] i.e., seen to be isolated from reality, we see that in reality we are free of the viewpoints "mine" and "egoity" (*nirahaṁkāra*). Of course we must beware of viewing the person as *being* "free of mine" and "free of egoity," since these are, as such, simply negative fabrications (2-3). Here the relevance of verse 6 is clear: when it is *appropriate*, i.e., of curative value, talk about "self" is legitimate, but in other contexts "selfless" is taught--though, as in the story of Vaccha,[1] ultimately neither "self" nor "selfless" should be dwelt on, since as views, their sometime usefulness is dangerous: they are both capable of being depended upon.

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[1] MMKV trans. in Jan Willem de Jong, *Cinq chapitres de la Prasannapadā* (Paris: Geuthner, 1949).

[2] Cf. the use of "pacified" at MMK 7.16 and 23.15.

In older traditional terms, to give up "mine" and "egoity" is to give up depending, and hence to win the cessation of samsaric suffering. In terms more specific to the Prajnaparamita tradition, release (*mokṣa*) occurs when the *kleśas* (as functions of *karma*) are destroyed, and since the *kleśas* are the result of fabrication[2] or ideational ex-pression (*prapañca*), the final means of the destruction of the *kleśas* is the Madhyamika's doctrine of emptiness, which is the means of stopping ex-pression (4-5). This then is the probable intent in verse 6: from the standpoint of conventional practical truth, there is a certain validity for a concept of "self" as well as for one of "selfless." But both of these are within the realm of *vikalpa* and must eventually be "stopped" with the ultimate truth, viz., "neither self nor selfless."

Ultimately all conceptual designations (the "nameable," *abhidhātavya*) must be relinquished, since the whole domain of thought (*cittagocara*) is put to rest by means of emptiness, and the domain of thought is the whole realm of categories (dharmas).[1] This is due to the fact that the real nature of things (dharmatā) is that they are unoriginated and unstopped (they do not "come into being" nor "cease their existence), and thus lacking own-being, they are not "nameable," nor thinkable, i.e., they are not within the domain of thought (7).

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[1] SN 4.399.

[2] *Vikalpa*; cf. MMK 23.1 where the term is *saṁkalpa*.

The next verse parallels verse 6: within the domain of thought, it is legitimate to speak of things as being "so" or "not so" or "both so and not so," though the last word (!) on the matter must be "neither so nor not so"; for things from the ultimate standpoint are not relative to anything else--they are "quieted" (śānta) and in their essential silence thus do not express themselves (aprapañcita) by means of the expressions (prapañca) of fabrication. The one (i.e., non-diverse) "characteristic" shared by all of reality is this fact of not being within the domain of fabricative thought, since the domain of thought is simply thought itself. This has already been demonstrated several times over, of course: what is dependently originated cannot be successfully defined by thought--it cannot be said to "exist" as or in itself nor to "exist" as an "other," relative to something else.[2] In other words, things cannot be said to be one

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[1] I take cittagocara here in the sense of the sixth āyatana of MMK 3.1, viz., manas and its related domain, dharmas--the totality of concept-formation.

[2] Cf. MMK 14, passim, and MMK 25.22f.

(either as individually self-existent or as forming a unified totality) or many (discrete relative to each other), since both of these characterizations are illegitimate relational concepts, at least from the ultimate standpoint (8-11).

Such is the fundamental teaching of the Buddhas, though, as vs. 12 suggests, this knowledge indicated by the Buddha is inherent to the nature of reality itself and does not depend on the historical appearance of Buddhas to be recognized; for even in an epoch in which Buddhism (i.e., Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha) has disappeared, there will be those who align themselves with the essential fact of non-relationality and realize by themselves (asaṁsargāt, "because they are non-related") the nature of reality and hence attain enlightenment.

Chapter 19 Kāla-parīkṣā: Critique of Time[1]

In this brief critique, which is closely related in content to chapter 11 on "before" and "after" the basic terms of all temporal sequence are examined. Here as in chapter 11, the terms under consideration, "past," "present," and "future," are each both unable to retain meaning apart from the others, yet necessarily are apart from each other if they are to indicate different things--which results in intolerable dilemmas. For if the concepts "present" and "future" logically presuppose a "past," they must then exist together _in_ the past, or else they will be isolated from and unrelated to the past, in which case they would be incapable of definition. The same analysis of course applies to "past" and "present" in relation to "future," and all other combinations of the three--as well as it applies to any similar sets of supposedly relatable terms. As an apparent afterthought, it is remarked that the concept of time is inseparable from that of the beings or conditions (_bhāva_) which it relates temporally; but the concept of "beings" has suffered repeated catastrophes already, so that any discussion of "when" they occur is obviated.

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[1] MMKV trans. in Jong, _Cinq Chapitres_.

Chapter 20 Sāmagrī-parīkṣā: Critique of Totality[1]

Once more the concept of causality is subjected to scrutiny, in this case the attack being directed at one form of the general doctrine of dependent origination, namely, that an effect (the chariot) is the result of the totality of its causes and conditions (the parts of the chariot and its assembly). The weakness in such an expression of the doctrine as this, though, is manifest: as soon as we say that the chariot is "the result of" something, we attribute a covert own-being to the chariot. Nagarjuna analyzes the problem largely in terms of the correlativity dialectic, though he also applies the no-own-being principle briefly (16-18, 21).

The question is posed: how does the totality (parts and assembly) generate the chariot? If the chariot is in the totality, it could be found within the totality (*gṛhyeta sāmagryām*), which it cannot be; and if the chariot is not in the totality, then it is unrelated to the totality and hence causeless, which results in a contradiction (1-4).

The simultaneity problem is then raised. If we say that the chariot has a cause and that the cause has ceased causing now that the chariot has been effected, we have conceptualized two causes: one the logical raison d'etre of the chariot, the other the temporally prior cause which effected the chariot and then ceased to be its cause. On the other hand, if we say that the chariot does not now present a cause but had its cause which has now ceased causing, we isolate the present chariot from its past cause and render it causeless, as before (5-6).

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[1] MMKV trans. in Jong, *Cinq Chapitres*.

To say, though, that the chariot is simultaneous with the totality (which seems to be the case), is to deny causality by obliterating the sequentiality of cause and effect and identifying them. It is needless to say that the only other alternative is for the chariot to somehow be prior to the totality, which is absurd (7-8).

If we retain the sequentiality, we are faced either with a chariot isolated from its causes, which had to cease being causes if they were to result in the effect, and in ceasing to be causes they could have no effect;--or we have the causes continuing to exist along with the chariot, in which case since they are still "causes" they do not cause anything, the chariot being already present (9-11).

The whole dilemma of simultaneity and sequentiality is spelled out in the next four stanzas. No matter how cause and effect are temporally conceived, their relationship is not viable. The chariot (i.e., the manifest one ridden by Milinda) is not a past (and hence "stopped," niruddha) chariot caused by a past totality, nor has it a presently existing cause (since it no longer needs a cause), nor of course does it have a not yet existent future cause--and so forth.

The notion of emptiness is then brought in first in the loose sense of non-existence, and then in the more technical sense of no own-being: If the chariot already exists in its (prior) causes, then it makes no sense to say that they then cause it; and if it does not already exist in them, then since it can come from no other causes, it becomes causeless (16). A chariot which is empty (of own-being) cannot be said either to originate or to cease to exist, since it lacks discrete reality; and a self-existent (non-empty) chariot, being independent by nature, would derive from no causes nor could it cease to exist. In neither case is it possible, then, to claim that the chariot is the effect of its causes (17-18, 21).

There are only two possibilities: either cause and effect occur simultaneously, since they are logically mutually dependent, or they occur discretely and separately. In the first instance, however, simultaneous occurrence would entail mutual identity, thus denying any distinction; and in the second instance, separate occurrence would remove the necessary relation between them (19-20). Finally, it cannot be demonstrated that the chariot is the effect of its causes and conditions, nor can it be said that it is not effected by them, since it could have no other source. And if the chariot cannot then be legitimately (i.e., ultimately) called an "effect," there is consequently no justification for speaking of its "causes and conditions" at all.

Chapter 21 Saṁbhavavibhava-parīkṣā: Critique of Coming-to-be and Ceasing-to-be[1]

This chapter is quite closely related to the preceding, and indeed duplicates a great deal of it in slightly altered form. Instead of the concept of the chariot as the effect of a totality of causes and conditions, we have the chariot as coming-to-be ("integrating," appearing) and ceasing-to-be ("desisting"). The chapter is probably also placed here because of its topical relation to the following chapter, in which the "coming-to-be" and "ceasing-to-be" of the Tathagata are discussed.

Just as with cause and effect, coming-to-be and ceasing-to-be are mutually dependent concepts yet existentially sequential: death (or taking the chariot apart) simultaneously presupposes birth (assembling the chariot), yet they cannot exist simultaneously. On the other hand, the coming to be of something (via causes and conditions, it is assumed) entails its non-permanence, yet it cannot simultaneously come to be and cease to be. The assembling and taking apart of the chariot are consequently inconceivable by the concepts coming-to-be and ceasing-to-be, just as the chariot was inconceivable in cause-effect terms (1-6).

Several other brief criticisms are applied to the concepts in question. Borrowing from chapter 7,[2] I imagine, it is pointed out that if we apply the categories of coming-to-be and ceasing-to-be to themselves, as we should be able to do since they are equivalents of the *saṁskṛtalakṣaṇas*, we get senseless results, for we do not find any coming-to-be of destruction nor does it make sense to speak of the ceasing-to-be of destruction (7). We only conceive of coming-to-be and ceasing-to-be in relation to a being which comes to be and ceases to be, but as was shown in chapter 21.17-18, the concept of being is itself untenable (8-9). And as in 21.19-20, coming-to-be and ceasing-to-be can be conceived of neither as identical nor as discrete, since with either alternative the concepts lose their mutual dependency. The conclusion, here as everywhere else in the MMK, is that the concepts which are "seen into" (*dṛśyate*) reality are the product of delusion (*moha*) (10-11).

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[1] MMKV trans. in Jong, Cinq Chapitres.

[2] MMK 7.21 and 7.26.

The discussion then shifts to further consideration of the "being" which is supposed to come to be and cease to be, using the methods established as far back as chapter one (12-13). The (Hinayana) alternative doctrine is that of a continuity or series (*saṁtāna*) of causes and effects which come to be and cease to be, forming a "becoming" (*bhava*) from birth to birth, rather than a "being." But this doctrine is subject to the same criticisms made in the preceding chapter which showed the impossibility of relating a ceasing cause with an arising effect. If on the other hand there were such a thing as a real being, it would not be part of becoming,

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since it would never cease being that being--and as a result one could not speak of nirvana as a possibility, since nirvana entails the cessation of becoming. It follows then that "becoming" would entail a disjunction between the last (dying) moment in this life and the first in the next; while "being" would not allow of a "next--i.e., changing, becoming--moment at all. The conclusion is that the continuity cannot be established because of problems of sequentiality and simultaneity, but since the concept of the "continuity of becoming" depends on that time sequence which makes it impossible, it cannot be validated.

Chapter 22 Tathāgata-parīkṣā: Critique of the Tathagata[1]

The topic of this chapter is closely related to that of chapter 16, on bondage and release, as well as to chapter 27, the critique of views. The notion here dealt with is that of the Tathagata as being either "in samsara" or "in nirvana," though the analysis could apply to the concept of "a person," whether enlightened or unenlightened.

As in chapter 16, the examination of the *skandhas* does not reveal an entity to which the name Tathagata could refer--an entity with its own reality (i.e., *svabhāva*). A Tathagata dependent on skandhas *ipso facto* does not "exist" by his own being, nor does he "derive" his existence from them, since they cannot be shown to have *their* own being[2] (2-4). On the other hand, a self-existent Tathagata would exist in himself apart from the *skandhas*, but if he is now visibly present, he is manifestly dependent upon them, and this presents a contradiction (5). But no Tathagata (or any person) is possible without *skandhas* to constitute him in the first place, so that vs. 5 really postulates a non-existent as well as non-dependent Tathagata which then is supposed to begin depending upon some skandhas for his existence--utter nonsense. Moreover, it is invalid to speak of a set of *skandhas* which are not already the constituting support

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[1] MMKV trans. in Jong, *Cinq Chapitres*.

[2] "Derived-being," an invalid concept as chap. 15 has demonstrated.

(upādāna) of the person who "is there" dependent upon them. Put simply, there is no person apart from the set of skandhas nor any set of skandhas apart from the person. The conclusion is that since the Tathagata cannot be shown to exist apart from the skandhas in any sense, he cannot be shown (prajñapyate) as existing dependent on them either (6-8). Not only that, but the skandhas (as the support, upādāna) themselves also reveal no own-being (and hence no derived being), and this leaves us with a Tathagata empty of his own being dependent on and spoken of (prajñapyate) by means of a dependency (the skandhas) which is void of its own being (9-10).[1]

At this point part of the traditional 14-fold list of views is recalled as a preface[2] to some final remarks on the "existence" of the Tathagata after his parinirvāṇa. Any notion of existence or non-existence of the Tathagata after (final) nirvana would be as much an empty fabrication as the notion of the living Tathagata as "existing" or "not existing." The lack of own-being of the Tathagata makes both notions inapplicable to him, just as in MN no. 72 the example of a fire is used as an analog of the extinguished Tathagata. The fire, which depends upon its fuel, cannot be said to have departed to someplace where it exists, anymore than it can be said to have "lost" the existence it had when there was still fuel, and hence to have become "non-existent." No concept about the fire-after-its-extinction is anything but fabricated conceptual expression (*prapañca*), and so is any concept about a Tathagata who, like all the rest of reality, is forever beyond all the rest of reality, is forever beyond all conceptual expressions (*prapañcātīta* *avyayam*). Even the concepts "empty" and "non-empty" ultimately should not be applied to the Tathagata and to the rest of reality, since they are more teaching conveniences of practical truth for pointing out (*prajñapti*) the ultimate truth, that reality can only be seen by those who are not at the mercy of their own conceptualizations (*prapañcahata*) (13-16, 11).

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[1] I suspect verse 11 to be out of place here. It would fit the context better someplace following verse 14, where the admonition makes more sense, and this is tentatively how I interpret the text.

[2] This may be an interpolation; it seems even more out of context than does the preceding verse.

Chapter 23 Viparyāsa-parīkṣā: Critique of Error[1]

"Error" in this chapter refers primarily to the traditional set of four errors, namely,[2] to see self in what is without self, the pure in what is impure, permanence in what is impermanent, and happiness in what is suffering. These errors constitute the ignorance which when stopped results in enlightenment.

The chapter approaches the problem, however, through an analysis of the three afflictions (*kleśa*), which are the result of fabrication.[3] Each of the three, desire, hatred, and delusion, is associated with its appropriate fabricated object, the pleasant, the unpleasant, and the errors enumerated above. There are thus quite a few interrelated concepts which are to be voided in the course of the critique, the first to be attacked being the set of *kleśas* itself. These arise only dependent on their (fabricated) objects, and hence are empty of reality (2). Moreover, the concept "afflictions" implies someone who is afflicted--a self--which results in familiar difficulties (3-5).

If we examine the concepts of pleasant, unpleasant, and errors, we will find them to be incapable of a separate existence upon which the afflictions could then arise dependently. The world as fabricated into its 6 objective categories (form, sound, etc.) comprises objects (vastu) of desire, hatred, and delusion. But since such categories exist only as conventional and correlative[1] vikalpa, isolated (kevala) from reality--the pleasantness or unpleasantness of those objects is mere (emotional) fabrication about more fabrication (6-9). Besides that, the mutual dependency of the concepts pleasant and unpleasant requires that each exist prior to the other in order to define it: the pleasant entails an a priori unpleasant for its definition, but there can be no unpleasant as an a priori without a pleasant a priori to it--once more simultaneity. But no such simultaneity of pleasant and unpleasant objects occurs in reality, which demands one or the other independently of the other: if I regard the roach as "unpleasant," I am fabricating a mental "pleasant" simultaneously, each concept defining the other entirely within the realm of subjective fantasy, leaving the roach free of (and unaffected by) such arbitrary impositions, and hence not actually providing a real object for my affliction of hatred (10-12).

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[1] MMKV trans. in May, *Candrakīrti*, pp. 179-205.

[2] Cf. vss. 21ff.

[3] *Saṁkalpa* here, meaning the same as *vikalpa* at MMK 18.5.

From this point on, the concept of error itself is scrutinized in connection with the traditional set of four errors mentioned above. No-own-being is the principle applied to the error seeing permanence in what is impermanent. For this to be an error the concept of impermanence would first have to be justified, but emptiness disallows an entity which exists without permanence;[1] i.e., since "impermanence" must be *of* something--dharmas--that "impermanence" can only be imagined of a real, though temporary, being. Hence there can be no impermanence of the empty, and the opposite of what is not true cannot meaningfully be called an error; indeed, on the premise of emptiness, the concept of impermanence itself is as erroneous as the concept of seeing permanence in impermanence (13-14).

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[1] Cf. chap. 3.

Even more fundamentally, the notion of "concept" is itself questioned, for as with any other set of interrelated terms, the set "conceiver" (*grahitṛ*), "means of conceiving" (*yena gṛhṇāti*), "object of conception" (*yad gṛhyate*), and "concept" (*grāha*)--each and all are mutually dependent and therefore empty of independent meaning; they are "pacified"[2] and hence the notion of an independently real concept (with its "own meaning") is inadmissible. And without an already existent correct or erroneous concept, no conceiver-of-correct-and-erroneous-concepts is possible either (15-16).

The method of chapter 2 is applied in vss. 17-19 in order to demonstrate the difficulty of relating errors to the subject in error. An error does not come-to-be for me insofar as I was in error in the past, nor does it insofar as I have not yet been in error, and if I am presently in error, the coming-to-be of my error is no longer relevant--succinctly put, I can't go wrong. If the error is not already present (originated), it seems that there will never be any error, and if it is not present, how can I be said to "go wrong"?[1]

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[1] Cf. MMK 21.14-21.

[2] Cf. MMK 7.16.

The last consideration made is the simplest. If the four so-called erroneous items *are* real, they are obviously not errors; but if they are not real, then their opposites are not real either, since they depend for their meaning upon those errors (21-22).

The conclusion in vs. 23 is to be understood on two levels simultaneously. Conventionally, ignorance is destroyed when error, which arises from the affliction of delusion, is destroyed. Ultimately, ignorance is destroyed when (the fabricated concept) "error" (and the fabricated concept "delusion" as well) is destroyed. Indeed, if we remain at the conventional level of truth we are faced with the problem of "getting rid of" the affliction of delusion, which immediately raises the usual dilemmas over the existence or non-existence of said affliction.

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[1] Verse 20 is apparently an interpolation, accepted by Candrakirti, which attempts to apply the formula of chap. 1.1 to verse 19 in a way which is contextually inappropriate. Cf. May, *Candrakīrti*, n. 656.

Chapter 24 Āryasatyāni-parīkṣā: Critique of the Aryan Truths[1]

Another way of saying that everything is without own-being is to say simply that everything is empty (śūnya) and chapter 24 begins with objections (1-6) to the term emptiness, posed by a non-sunyavadin Buddhist[2] who presents us with a series of disastrous implications which apparently follow from the doctrine of emptiness. If everything is empty, then nothing can be spoken of as "coming about" or "ceasing," and thus the four Aryan truths would not exist. Without them there is no Dharma at all, and consequently no Buddha nor Sangha. In short, the exponent of emptiness not only annihilates the Buddhist way of life, but also denies the moral categories of right and wrong (dharma and adharma), as well as "all worldly practical affairs (sarvasaṁvyavahāra laukikaḥ)."

These objections are reminiscent of the puzzled response of King Milinda to Nagasena's refusal to grant himself any real existence.[3] Just as there the non-existence of a permanent self seemed to entail nihilistic consequences for both Buddhist and lay morality, so here the emptiness of all things apparently leads to the same conclusion. Both King Milinda and the present objector reacted naively to the negative form of the terms "non-self" and "emptiness," without any awareness of the meaning of the terms in Buddhist thought. The confusion is immediately cleared up in very similar terms, for just as Nagasena explains the nature of the person as a functional interrelationship of parts, instead of appealing to an independent soul-substrate, so Nagarjuna explains the nature of all things as dependently originated and, therefore, as devoid of independent self-existence. Indeed, Nagarjuna's explanation can be considered simply an amplification of the point of view in the Milinda passage,[1] in which the concept of dependent origination has been generalized and termed such.

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[1] MMKV trans. in May, Candrakīrti, pp. 206-50.

[2] This seems to be about as narrowly as he might be characterized, since his objections are no more Mahayanist than Hinayanist.

[3] Cf. MP pp. 25f.

Nagarjuna begins his reply with a preparatory statement of utmost importance to the Madhyamika approach. This is the doctrine of two truths, which has been implicit in the rest of the MMK, but which is explicitly mentioned only here.[2] Here the two truths are called "the superficial truth of the world (*lokasaṁvṛtisatya*)" and "truth in the ultimate sense (*satyaṁ paramārthataḥ*)." The reason for their mention at this point is clear: there can be no teaching of the higher truth unless pragmatic or conventional truth (*vyavahāra*) can be utilized, for although enlightenment is actually "beyond" the realm of practical truth, there is no attainment of nirvana, no enlightenment, unless there is some teaching to indicate (*prajñapti*) the way to the highest truth. The point implied here is that the realm of pragmatic truth must indeed be validated before the ultimate truth can be indicated. The rest of the chapter demonstrates that it is only on the premise of emptiness that practical truth can be established. At the same time though, we are warned, emptiness as misunderstood by the dull-witted can be dangerous in most destructive ways, and it was for precisely this reason that the Buddha hesitated to teach after his enlightenment (24.11f.). To the uninformed, the notion of "emptiness" no doubt looks like a dangerous doctrine with a nihilistic intent, while the notion of "real being (sadbhāva)" seems positive and sensible. This of course is an illusion, for the concept of real being is itself the nihilistic one. All of the practical truths "hold (yujyate)" only on the premise of emptiness: to reject emptiness is to reject common-sense, causal relationships in general, and the Buddhist Way in particular.

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[1] As Candrakirti suggests at MMKV 504.8.

[2] Cf. the extensive citations in May, *Candrakīrti*, n. 773.

The demonstration of this begins (24.18) with the definition of emptiness basic to the entire work:[1]

> That which is dependent origination we call emptiness. It is a useful indicator (prajñaptir upādāya). That is the middle way.

Central to the understanding of the Madhyamika viewpoint is the fact that "emptiness" or "dependent origination" is not the ultimate truth.[2] It is a teaching device, a metaphorical indicator of the ultimate truth, and thus is a concept of the understanding. But ultimate truth is what is free of the "covering (saṁvṛti)" concepts and mental fabrications, both valid and invalid. Chapter 24 is concerned with demonstrating that emptiness is, as a premise of pragmatic truth, indispensable. Chapters 13 and 18, treated immediately below, apply the principle of emptiness from the standpoint of ultimate truth, showing the emptiness of "emptiness" itself. Chapter 24, however, is content to show the necessity of the principle of emptiness for any understanding of the world.

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[1] Cf. May, Candrakīrti, n. 840.

[2] Cf. May, Candrakīrti, n. 840.5.

Here are raised the familiar difficulties inherent to the concept of own-being. Since everything that there is is dependently originated, there is nothing which has own-being. If there were own-being, nothing could come about or cease. In particular, if suffering does not depend upon a cause for its origin, it would never appear if it did not already exist, nor, existing, would it ever cease to exist. But it is manifest that men do follow a way to the cessation of suffering (24.24), and therefore suffering does not have own-being. The full logic of the concept of own-being is brought out sharply in verses 37ff.: on the premise of own-being no state of affairs could be affected in any way, since it would maintain its existence in absolute independence of outside factors:

> [if there were] own being the moving-world (jagat) would be unborn (ajāta), without destruction (aniruddha), immovable (kūṭastha), deprived of its varied conditions. (38)

But since the world is manifestly not changeless, it must be without own-being; to exist as the world does--namely, in process and functional interdependence--it must be empty.

It should be stressed here that dependent origination is made the premise upon which the intelligibility of the world rests, and thus seems capable of acting as an ontological principle which might be made the basis for further development into a process philosophy of some sort.[1] This possibility, however, runs counter to the purpose of the Madhyamika technique, which is to divest the mind of all *vikalpa*, not to encourage the creation of new views, even if those views should prove to be valid in the limited sense of pragmatic truth. For this reason Nagarjuna makes use of the concept of dependent origination in the rest of the MMK not to evolve new speculative Buddhist theory, but rather to demonstrate the ultimate "emptiness" of all concepts, in order to help bring about the relinquishing of dependency upon them--a relinquishing which is itself the ultimate truth. One hint of the fact that Nagarjuna is not going to let the notion of emptiness rest simply at the "superficial" level of chapter 24 can be seen in the verse quoted just above. For it is necessary to pragmatic truth that the moving-world indeed move, change, have things in it which are born (*jāta*) and which are destroyed (*niruddha*) in turn. From the ultimate standpoint, however, reality is "characterized" precisely in such terms as "unproduced (_anutpanna_)" and "undestroyed (_aniruddha_)."[1]

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[1] Cf. Ramanan, *Nagarjuna's Philosophy*, p. 318.

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[1] For example, at MMK 25.3 and in the Dedication.

Chapter 25 Nirvāṇa-parīkṣā: Critique of Nirvana[1]

Coming from chapter 24 to the present one, the reader is asked to make a shift in standpoints, from a validation of a pragmatic Buddhist truth to a total refutation of the pragmatically necessary concept of nirvana. The chapter even begins with the same words as the preceding one, though here they are not the objections of a puzzled opponent, but form one part of the radical dialectic. It is true that if things are empty, without own-being, they cannot be said to come-to-be or cease-to-be; but at the same time if they have own-being, they cannot begin or stop existing. Nirvana, as a concept denoting the cessation of a state of affairs, is thus inapplicable to any state of affairs (1-2). The correct description of nirvana from the ultimate standpoint is essentially the same as that of dependent origination in the Dedication of the MMK: unoriginated and unstopped, as are all things lacking own-being; hence not existing eternally nor ever ceasing, no more than do all things, and therefore not something which might be "attained" any more than it could possibly be something to get rid of or ignore (3). If all of these negative attributes apply to nirvana, however, it must be clearly shown that nirvana is not one more thing among others, even though the same non-description applies to it that applies to phenomena in general. Nirvana is not a phenomenal entity (bhāva) at all, whether "entity" be understood as an individual phenomenon, or as a condition or state of affairs. The four alternative possibilities are examined one by one, beginning with the positive one. If nirvana is an entity, it must share in the characteristics of all entities, namely, dependently originated composition (saṁskṛta) which is subject to change and perishing. This of course would go against the purpose of the concept of nirvana, which is to indicate the state of freedom from dependency (upādāna), whereas there can be no such thing as a non-dependent composite, since it is only constituted through mutual dependencies (4-6).

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[1] MMKV trans. in Stcherbatsky, *Nirvāṇa*, pp. 183-212.

The negative alternative, that nirvana is (a) non-entity, is unsatisfactory, since it is absurd to speak of a state of affairs which has no existence and is simply "not there"; and not being there, what use would there be in saying that it is free of dependency (7-8)?

What from the pragmatic standpoint is dependently originated is from the ultimate standpoint not capable of being validly described as "being there" dependent upon its conditions (i.e., pratītya, upādāya)--this state of affairs, in which things can be said to be dependent, is the state free of dependency (anupādāna) called nirvana (9).

In this light it might seem legitimate to call nirvana neither entity nor non-entity, though even this can be considered only pragmatically valid, as is shown further on.

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First, however, the possibility, based on verse 9, that nirvana is both an entity and not an entity (i.e., the dependently originated which is "also" undependent and without conditions). Such a characterization, however, is inadmissible for several reasons. Nirvana is the state of release (mokṣa), and it is senseless to say that release is both an existent thing and a non-existent thing. Furthermore, the non-dependency of nirvana would be compromised if it were both, since such a nirvana would be determined by the mutual dependency of the positive term and its negative, both of which together, moreover, form a composite set of two, while nirvana is defined as non-composite. Besides, the notion of a simultaneity of the existence and non-existence of something is as invalid as that of the simultaneity of light and its absence (10-14). Reconsidering the statement in verse 10, then, we are forced to admit that, strictly speaking, the concept "neither entity nor non-entity" has a meaning only if the concepts "entity" and "non-entity" could be first conceived of as simultaneous and then negated. And such a description of nirvana can thus not even be conceived, even as a "convenient fiction" to indicate something about nirvana (15-16).

Chapter 22 has already demonstrated the impossibility of maintaining the real "existence" either of the Tathagata while present and alive or of the same Tathagata after death, i.e., as finally "in nirvana." In other words, both the state of affairs which is the samsara and the state of affairs which is nirvana, cannot be described as possessing existence, or non-existence, or both, or neither. In short, there is no justification whatsoever for conceiving of nirvana as apart from samsara (or vice versa). As verse 9 suggested earlier, the "difference" between nirvana and samsara is one only of truth-levels: the same reality conceived pragmatically as dependently originated is the reality of which no concept of relational, dependent character can be applied. Enlightenment and nirvana refer to the same reality as do ignorance and samsara (17-20).

Needless to say, all discussion of the "state of nirvana" after cessation as being either annihilation or continuance, is impossible without validation of the concepts "nirvana," coming to an "end," and continuing "eternally." Bur nirvana has already been prohibited from indicating either "existing" or "not existing," etc.--while notions about annihilation and eternality depend upon a prior concept of an existent being, which is of course inadmissible (21-23).

The conclusion of the chapter is perhaps the conclusion of the entire work, especially if chapters 26 and 27 are additions to an original shorter text, and presents--at least as I interpret it--a paradox characteristic of the *Prajñāpāramitā* texts: the purpose of the Dharma of the Buddha was the freeing of the mind from all fabricated concepts, though in the ultimate sense that Dharma never was a "doctrine" (in the sense of a "view," *darśana*) which was "taught" by one man and "learned" by another, but must have been rather a "dharma" of the same nature as the reality which it was intended to indicate--"quiet" (*śānta*) and "unmanifested by verbal expression."[1]

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[1] Cf. MMK 18.9.

Chapter 27 Dṛṣṭi-parīkṣā: Critique of views[1]

The particular views treated here are specified in the first two stanzas, and are representative of the more exhaustive list of possible speculative viewpoints in the *Brahmajālasutta* of the DN,[2] where the views are specifically those "heresies" premised on one or another notion of a self. The more general sense of *dṛṣṭi* as any and all views, is probably intended in vs. 30 which refers to the "true Dharma for the getting rid of all views." In this sense each of the chapters of the MMK is a critique of a view.

The approach used in dealing with the first view, "I existed in a past (life)," is in much the same terms as those of chapter 22, where the relation of dependency (*upādāna*) and depender (*upādātṛ*) was at stake. The view is invalid in the first place because the present "I" and the past "I" are clearly not identical if for no other reason than that past and present are not simultaneous. To say that that past "I" is the same self as the present one would entail a self distinct from its dependency (the aggregates), since the past and present aggregates are clearly not the same--but such an independent self is indemonstrable. On the other hand, if the self is constituted by the aggregates, one would have to admit that no self exists, since the aggregates are transitory, whereas the self is supposed to endure. Besides, equating the self with the aggregates would mean identifying the agent (*upādātṛ*) and the object of its action (*upādāna*). The only alternative is to disassociate the self from the aggregates, but no such "disembodied" self can be conceived. The conclusion is that the concept "self" cannot be validly related to that of its supporting dependency, the aggregates, either as identical with or distinct from them, though there can be no self without aggregates, and one cannot simply say that there is no self (3-8).

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[1] MMKV trans. in May, *Candrakirti*, pp. 277-98.

[2] Cf. May, *Candrakīrti*, n. 1015; also Nalinaksha Dutt, "The Brahmajālasutta in the Light of Nāgārjuna's Exposition," IHQ, VIII (1932), 706-23.

The negation of the above view, "I did not exist in a past (life)," receives similar treatment. The present "I" cannot be entirely other than the past one, for that would entail the birth of a new self unrelated to a previous self, with the result that no past karma would have present effects, or that the new present self were experiencing the karma-effects of another's past self: the present self would either be entirely the product of transitory, causally conditioned aggregates (and hence essentially impermanent), or it would be without any cause at all (9-12).[1]

In the same light can be handled the views regarding eternality. A god is assumed to have been a man at one time or another in the course of his transmigration. Eternality would require that the god and the man be identical: the god cannot have come to be such, since this would entail a change in nature. But if they are essentially different, there could be no continuity through the course of transmigration. An alternative might be for part of the man's nature to be identical with the god and the other part to be involved in change, but this would then be both eternalism and its opposite together simultaneously and in contradiction. The fourth alternative, neither-eternal-nor-not-eternalism, is totally meaningless when the third alternative is inconceivable. Eternality can be proved if it could be demonstrated that a being, unchanging by nature, comes thence and hither and goes hence and thither, but there is no such mobile yet unaltering being. Finally, if the concept "eternal" does not apply to anything, "non-eternal" (and both combinations of the two) loses its own validity, since it has meaning only in relating to the concept "eternal" (15-20).

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[1] This section and the following ones clearly depend on *petitio principii* arguments: transmigration is assumed as an unquestioned premise.

The last set of views (21-28), those concerning the end or endlessness of the world, are discussed with almost exactly the same arguments--and the same begging of the question--as in the preceding cases, and hence need not be discussed in detail here.

CONCLUSION

The Perfection of Wisdom and the Mādhyamika Kārikās share a common purpose: to promote the cessation of mental suffering through the elimination of its cause, clinging or dependency (upādāna). Although the objects of dependency are traditionally classified[1] as four--things desired (kāma), views (dṛṣṭi), monastic vows and rules (śīlavrata), and the belief in a self (ātmavāda)--the medium of dependency is conceptual fabrication (vikalpa), the attempt by consciousness to grasp hold of and retain the contents of experience in the only way possible for it to accomplish this: through the attribution of a real self-identity to things or events, and through the conceptual imposition of the whole network of spatial and temporal relationships between identities. The dependent consciousness thus lives in a world made conceptually dependable, but, for that reason, a world which to "maintain" itself exists only through contradicting the real nature of things which are void of self-identity (own-being), just as are Milinda's "chariot" and Nagasena's "self." This contradiction between fictive identities and their abstract relationships on the one hand, and impermanent, dependently-originated actualities on the other--is experienced as suffering.

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[1] See the references under "upādāna" in the PTSD.

The inherent connection between dependency and concepts is the main theme of both the Perfection of Wisdom and the Kārikās, though it is here that Nagarjuna's originality is most apparent, in that he draws out the full implication of the relation between dependency and conceptual thought.[1] Since it is dependency which fashions concepts, it can be said that concepts function by means of dependency: a concept is an objectified dependency which derives its meaning-function only from its relational dependency upon other concepts. Concepts are purely contextual in their meaning, just as it might be said that the being of the chariot is purely contextual, i.e., it is dependently originated. The circle of logic is now neatly completed, for just as the "chariot-hood" of Milinda's chariot and the "self-hood" of Nagasena are dissolved away as fictions through the application of the doctrine of dependent origination, so can all concepts whatsoever be emptied of intrinsic meaning by examining them in the light of their dependent origination--not their dependence upon reality, to be sure, but upon a conceptual context fabricated by the mind and superimposed upon reality. And just as mental depending has nothing to maintain itself but what it makes into a dependency, so concepts maintain their meaning only by virtue of their relation to other concepts. Freedom from suffering, then, is simply the state of mind which is not depending upon dependencies. In the language of the

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[1] See above, pp. 71ff.

Perfection of Wisdom this is the "unattached cognition" (asaṅgajñāna),[1] the state of no-thought (acitta) which is the "clear" thought or mind (prabhāsvara citta).[2] This is the state of mind which is free of the compulsion to fabricate concepts in order to hold onto and thereby control its world of experience. Implicit in such a statement is Nagarjuna's assertion that nirvana is not different from samsara.[3] The world experienced by unattached cognition is the same world as is conceptually made dependable by "attached cognition."

What is the content of clear, non-dependent consciousness? If it is free of concepts fabricated and retained, then strictly speaking it has no content of its own. Just as nothing has its own being but "is" constituted by dependent origination, so consciousness is essentially empty of its own being and is constituted purely by its immediate total context --dependent upon lamp, wick, oil, and spark, there originates a flame; dependent upon sensory equipment, an object, and their contact, there originates a specific consciousness or awareness of a particular, actual, experiential context. With any change in that configuration of elements, there is a resultant modification of awareness, possible only insofar as consciousness is empty of its own thought, namely, conceptual fabrication.

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[1] APP p. 274.

[2] APP p. 5.

[3] MMK 25.19.

From the standpoint of both the *Perfection of Wisdom* and the *Kārikās*, perfect wisdom or enlightenment can be called paradoxic awareness, for the nature of the enlightened mind is precisely its freedom from all fabricated dependencies, i.e., from all *doxa* or views (*dṛṣṭi*).[1] It is essential to note that paradoxic awareness does not mean awareness of paradox. A paradox, in the strict sense, is a notion which is contrary to another, more accepted notion; the *Perfection of Wisdom* makes great use of verbal paradox as a device for encouraging the mind to relinquish its attachment to *any doxa* --in particular, Buddhist *doxa*. The equivalent technique in the *Kārikās* is *reductio ad absurdum* argumentation applied to any and all views and concepts. It would perhaps be more accurate to say that enlightenment is "adoxic" rather than paradoxic, especially in light of the doctrine of two truths. It is inaccurate to say that emptiness is the ultimate truth; it is rather that from the standpoint of ultimate truth the doctrine (*doxa*) of emptiness can be applied in a paradoxic fashion to any doctrine (including that of "emptiness"). The ultimate truth is not that the world is characterized by emptiness, nor that it is not so characterized, nor, for that matter, "that" it is anything at all. The ultimate truth is simply the awareness of the world as it is apart from all conceptualizations about it. The ultimate "message" of the *Perfection of Wisdom* is that all thought is about thought, and all talk is about talk--"reality," the world as it is, on the other hand, is free of fabrications (avikalpa), quiet (śānta) and beyond words (avacana). And the ultimate "argument" of the Kārikās is the same, that the cessation of suffering is the result of abandoning all arguments.[1] This final silence is the ultimate truth: the silence which is the nature of reality is the silence of the Buddha.

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[1] Cf. MMK 13.8; 27.30.

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[1] Including those of agnosticism, nihilism, and scepticism, all of which are conceptual viewpoints.

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APPENDIX

TRANSLATION OF THE MĀDHYAMIKA KĀRIKĀS OF NAGARJUNA

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The Dedication

Him I honor, the Fully Enlightened, the best of speakers, who pointed out dependent origination [which is] the benign stilling of verbal expression, without cessation, without origination, without eternality, without annihilation, not one, not many, not coming, not going.

CHAPTER 1

Critique of Conditions

1. No beings whatsoever are ever found originated from themselves, from another, from both, nor causelessly.

2. The four causal conditions (*pratyaya*) are cause (*hetu*), support (*ālambana*), continuity (*anantara*), and influence (*ādhipateya*); there is no fifth causal condition.

3. For[1] own-being of beings is not found in [their] causal conditions; own-being not being found, derived-being is not found.

4. Activity (*kriyā*) does not have causal conditions, nor does activity have no causal conditions; causal conditions, moreover, do not exist possessed of activity and not possessed of activity.

5. These causal conditions "originate dependent (*pratītya*) upon these [others]"; insofar as these do not originate, why are they not free of causal conditions?

6. A causal condition is not admissible either for a non-existing nor for an existing thing (*artha*). Of what, not existing, is there a causal condition? Existing, how can it be through the causal condition?

7. When no existing, non-existing, existing and non-existing dharma is produced, such being the case, how is a productive cause (*nirvartako hetuḥ*) admissible?

8. This dharma, existing, is shown to be unsupported (*anālambana*), and when a dharma is without support, whence, on the other hand, a support?

9. Cessation does not occur when dharmas are unoriginated, hence continuity is inapplicable; and having ceased, what causal condition [applies]?

10. Since the existence (*sattā*) of beings without own-being is not found, [the principle] "this existing, that comes to be"--this just does not occur.

11. The fruit of those [causes] does not exist [either] in separate [or] in combined causal conditions, and how can that exist because of causal conditions which is not in the causal conditions?

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[1] Stanzas 2 and 3 have undoubtedly been transposed.

12. And moreover not [yet] existing, that develops from [its] causal conditions; why does the fruit not develop without causal conditions?

13. The fruit is constituted by [its] causal conditions; causal conditions are not self-constituted. How [is] the fruit which is from [what is] not self-constituted [to be] constituted by causal conditions?

14. Therefore the fruit is not constituted by causal conditions, nor is it not constituted by causal conditions; from the non-being of the fruit, whence are found [its] causal conditions and non-causal conditions?

CHAPTER 2

Critique of Motion

1. The [space already] traversed is not traversed, just as the [yet] untraversed is not traversed; apart from traversed and untraversed, the [space presently] being-traversed is not traversed.

2. Since where there is activity (*ceṣṭā*) there is motion, and that [activity] is in [the space] being traversed, activity not being in the traversed nor in the untraversed-motion is in the [space] being-traversed.

3. [But] how will the motion of the being-traversed occur, when a dual motion in the being-traversed does not occur?

4. For whom there is motion of the being-traversed, for him it follows that the being-traversed is without motion, for the being-traversed is [what is] traversed.

5. A duality of motion is entailed in the motion of the being-traversed: that by which it [is a space which is] being-traversed, and on the other hand, that which is the motion in it.

6. Two movers would follow when a duality of motion is entailed, for apart from a mover, motion does not occur.

7. If the mover is set aside, motion does not occur; motion not existing, then whence will there be a mover?

8. The mover does not move, just as a non-mover does not move, and other than a mover and a non-mover, what third [alternative] moves?

9. "Insofar as [there is] a mover, it moves"--just how will this occur, when a mover without motion does not occur?

10. The opinion , "the mover moves," of him who, desiring the motion of the mover, entails a mover without [its] motion.

11. Moreover, two motions follow if the mover moves--that by which it is called "a mover" and that which, being a mover, [then] moves.

12. [Motion] does not begin to move in the [space already] traversed, it does not begin to move in the [yet] untraversed, it does not begin in the [presently] being-traversed--where does it begin to move?

13. Prior to the beginning of motion there is neither being-traversed nor [already] traversed in which motion might begin; [and] whence [could there be] motion in the [yet] untraversed?

14. How are traversed, being-traversed, untraversed fabricated (vikalpyate), when the beginning of motion is not at all being seen?

15. A mover does not rest, just as a non-mover does not rest; and other than a mover and a non-mover, what third [alternative] rests?

16. "Insofar as [there is] a mover, it rests"--just how will this occur, when a mover without motion does not occur?

17. It does not rest by reason of the being-traversed, of the traversed, or of the untraversed. Motion and [its] commencement and cessation are [to be treated] the same as [the preceding refutations of] motion.

18. "Just that which is the motion is the mover"--this is not admissible; on the other hand, "the mover is other than motion" is not admissible.

19. For if that which was motion were indeed the mover, an identity of actor and action would follow.

20. But if the mover is conceived other than the motion, motion would be without the mover, the mover would be other than the motion.

21. A proof (siddhi) of those two is not found through identity or through difference; how then is a proof of them [to be] found?

22. That move because of which the mover is called [a mover] --that move the mover does not make, since it does not exist prior to the move--for someone goes somewhere.

23. That mover does not make a move other than that one by which it is so-called, since when one [mover] proceeds, two moves do not occur.

24. A really existing mover does not move [through any of] the three-moded motion, nor not really existing does it move [through] the three-moded motion.

25. Really and not really existing it does not move [through] the three-moded motion. Therefore motion, mover, and the move are not found.

CHAPTER 3

Critique of Sight and the Other Senses

1. [the faculties] seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and mind are the senses; seeables, etc.--the six--are the domain (*gocara*) of these;

2. For [the faculty of] seeing does not see itself. That which does not see itself, how will it see others?

3. The example of fire[1] is not adequate for the proof of seeing--that is confuted (*pratyukta*) along with seeing by [the critique of] motion.

4. When no seeing at all exists [which] is not the process-of-seeing, how is it possible to say that [the faculty of] seeing sees?

5. [The faculty of] seeing does not see, nor does non-seeing see. Moreover, the seer would have to be explained [only] by [the faculty of] seeing.

6. There is no seer apart from seeing nor not apart from seeing; when the seer does not exist, whence are seeable and seeing?

7. As the arising of the son is said to be dependent upon the parents, so the arising of consciousness is said to be dependent upon eye and form.

8. Because of the non-existence of seeable and seeing, the [series of] four beginning with consciousness[2] do not exist; further, how [then] will [the series] beginning with dependency (*upādāna*)[3] exist?

9. One should know hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and mind [to be] explained (*vyākhyāta*) by [the example of] seeing--[as well as] hearer, hearable, etc.

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[1] Cf. MMK Ch. 10.

[2] Viz., consciousness, contact, feeling, thirst.

[3] Viz., dependency, becoming, birth, old-age-and-death.

CHAPTER 4

Critique of the Aggregates

1. Apart from the cause of form, form is not perceived; and apart from form, the cause of form is not seen.

2. If form is apart from the cause of form, it follows that the form is without cause, but nowhere is there anything without cause.

3. But if there were a cause of form apart from form, the cause would be without an effect, but there is no cause without an effect.

4. If the form exists, the cause of form does not occur; if the form does not exist, the cause of form does not occur.

5. On the other hand, a form without a cause does not occur. Thus one should not fabricate any fabrications relating to form.

6. That the effect is like the cause does not occur; that the effect is not like the cause does not occur.

7. The same method (*krama*) [of argument applies] to feelings, consciousness (*citta*), perceptions, and formations (*saṁskāra*) altogether, and to all beings as well.

8. He who when there is a dispute (*vigraha*) makes refutation by means of emptiness (*parihāraṁ śūnyatayā*), everything he [says] is unrefuted [and] becomes equal to the [thing which was] to be proved.

9. He who when there is made an exposition (*vyākhyāna*) makes opposition (*upālambha*) by means of emptiness, everything he [says] is unopposed [and] becomes equal to the [thing which was] to be proved.

CHAPTER 5

Critique of the Elements

1. There is no space prior to the character (lakṣaṇa) of space; if it existed prior to its character, it would follow [that it was] without character.

2. And there is no being anywhere without character. Where there is no characterless being, where is the character applicable?

3. The appearance (pravṛtti) of the character is not in the characterless nor in [that which is] possessed of character, nor does it appear anywhere else than in [that which is either] with character [or] without character.

4. And where there is no appearance of character, the characterizable (lakṣya) does not occur; and where there is no occurrence of the characterizable, there is no arising of character.

5. Thus the characterizable is not found, nor is the character found; moreover, apart from characterizable and character no being is found.

6. When being is not found, of what will there be non-being? And who, without the dharmas being and non-being, [would be] aware of (avaiti) being and non-being?

7. Thus space is neither being, non-being, characterizable, nor character. The remainder of the five elements are [to be treated] like space.

8. But those of little intelligence (alpabuddhi) who see is-ness and is-not-ness, they do not see the benign stilling of the seeable.

CHAPTER 6

Critique of Passion and the Impassioned

1. If the impassioned (*rakta*) were prior to passion (*rāga*) --apart from passion--passion would be dependent (*pratītya*) upon it; passion would exist when the impassioned existed.

2. On the other hand, the impassioned not existing, whence would passion be? This same method [should be applied] when there is existing or not-existing passion and impassioned.

3. A joint arising (*udbhūti*), moreover, is not applicable to passion and the impassioned, for they would both be mutually independent (*nirapekṣau parasparam*).

4. [Their] joint-being (*sahabhāva*) is not in unity, for that is not joint with itself; and how will there be joint-being in separateness?

5. If joint-being were in unity, it would exist without a correlative (*sahāya*); if joint-being were in separateness, it would exist without a correlative.

6. If there is joint-being in separateness, how is there proof of separate being of passion and the impassioned whence there [could be] joint-being of them?

7. Or if separate being is proved of passion and the impassioned, why do you fabricate joint-being of them?

8. "The separate is not proved," thus you desire joint-being; moreover, for the sake of the proof of joint-being you desire separateness.

9. Because of the non-proof of separate being, joint-being is not proved; this separate being existing, what joint-being [can] you desire?

10. Thus [there is] no proof of passion [as being] either together with nor not together with the impassioned; as with passion, [there is] no proof of any dharmas [as being] either together or not together.

CHAPTER 7

Critique of the Composite

1. If origination (*utpāda*) is composite (*saṁskṛta*), there the three-fold characters are joined with it; and if origination is non-composite, how can it be a characteristic of the composite?

2. The triad of origination [duration, and destruction] separately are not sufficient for the characterization of the composite; how could they be together in the same place at the same time?

3. If there were a further composite-characteristic of origination, duration, and destruction, there would be an infinite regress (*anavasthā*); if not, they would not be composite.

4. The origination of origination is only the origination of the initial origination; again, the initial origination produces the origination of origination.

5. If you [say that] the origination of origination is the origination of the initial origination, how will [what] is not [yet] produced by the initial [origination] produce it?

6. If you [say that what] is produced by the initial [origination] produces the initial [origination], how does the initial [origination] produce it by means of it?

7. [We] grant you that the one, in originating, would originate the other, if the other, [being as yet] unproduced, were capable of originating the one.

8. As a light illuminates[1] itself and another, so origination would originate both itself and another.

9. Darkness is not in the light, nor where one is placed; what does the light illuminate, since illumination is the destroyer of darkness?

10. How is darkness destroyed by an originating light, when the light, [in its] originating does not reach the darkness?

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[1] Read *samprakāśayate*. Cf. May, *Prasannapadā*, n. 283.

11. Or else, if the darkness is destroyed by the light [which] has not reached it, [the light], existing here, will destroy darkness existing anyplace in the world.

12. If light illuminates itself and another, darkness too will doubtless obscure itself and another.

13. How could this [still] unoriginated origination produce itself; and if [already] originated [it] produces, what is [again going to be] produced in [what is already] produced?

14. Neither [what is in process of] originating, nor the originated, nor the not [yet] originated [can be said to] originate; so it is explained by [the critique of] motion.

15. This originating does not take place in an origination, so how is the originating said to be dependent on an origination?

16. Whatever is dependent (*pratītya*) is pacified by nature (*svabhāvatas*); therefore originating is pacified, and also the origination.

17. If any [yet] unoriginated being is found anywhere, [and] should it originate, how does it originate when that being does not exist?

18. And if this origination originates the originating, what then is the origination [which] would originate that origination?

19. If another one originates this one, origination is an infinite regression; and [if] the originated is without origination, everything originates thus.

20. So origination of the existing and of the non-existing is not admissible, nor of both [together]--this was demonstrated previously.

21. No origination of a ceasing being occurs, but there does not occur a being which is not ceasing.

22. A being [which has already] endured does not [come to] stay, nor does a being [which has not yet] endured [come to] stay, nor does a [presently] enduring one [come to] stay; and what [as yet] unoriginated one stays?

23. No duration (*sthiti*) of a ceasing being occurs, but there does not occur a being which is not ceasing.

24. When all beings are always characterized by old-age and death, what beings endure which are without old-age and death?

25. The duration of duration because of a further [secondary] duration, or just because of itself, is not admissible--just as the origination of origination is not because of itself nor because of another [one].

26. [What has as yet] not ceased does not cease, nor does [what has already] ceased cease, [and] likewise the [presently] ceasing; [and] what [as yet] unproduced ceases?

27. Thus occurs no cessation of a being [which has already] endured; nor does cessation occur of a being [which has as yet] not ceased.

28. Thus [a given] condition (*avasthā*) does not cease through the condition, nor does one condition cease because of another condition.

29. When no origination of all dharmas occurs, then no cessation of all dharmas occurs.

30. And so cessation of an existing being does not occur, for no being and non-being occur in unity.

31. Moreover, cessation of a non-existing being does not occur, just as there is no cutting-off of a second head.

32. Cessation does not exist because of itself nor because of something else, just as the origination of origination is not because of itself nor because of something else.

33. There is no composite, because of the non-proof of origination, duration, and destruction; when there is no proof of the composite, how will a non-composite be proved?

34. Like illusion (*māyā*), like a dream, like a city of the Gandharvas, thus is origination, thus is duration, thus is destruction--it is declared.

CHAPTER 8

Critique of Action and Actor

1. An actually existent (*sadbhūta*) actor does not do actually existent action; nor does a not actually existent actor attempt a not actually existent action.

2. There is no activity (*kriyā*) of an actual-existent, and action would exist without an actor; there is no activity of an actual-existent, and the actor would exist without action.

3. If a not actually existent actor does a not actually existent action, the action would be causeless and the actor would be causeless and the actor would be causeless.

4. A cause (*hetu*) not existing, an effect and [its] cause are not found; they not existing, activity, actor, and the instrument of action (*karaṇa*) are not found.

5. Without the appearance of activity, etc., there would be no right and wrong (*dharmādharma*); right and wrong not existing, there is no fruit born of them.

6. The fruit not existing, neither the way to release nor to heaven occurs, and the futility of all activities follows.

7. An actually and not actually existent actor does not do that [action which is both] existing and not existing; for existing and not existing are opposed to each other --whence [their] simultaneity (*ekatas*)?

8. And a not existing [act] is not done by an existing actor, nor an existing [act] by a not existing [actor]; for in that case all those errors follow.

9. Nor does an actually existent actor do either not actually existent nor actually-and-not-actually existent action, for the reasons given previously.

10. Nor does a not actually existent actor do an actually existent nor an actually-and-not-actually existent action, for the reasons given previously.

11. And an actually-and-not-actually existent actor does not do existing-and-not-existing action, but that should be understood by the reasons given previously.

12. An actor is dependent upon an action, and dependent upon that actor the action develops: we do not see any other means of proof [for them].

13. Thus should dependency be known: "from the abandonment of [the notions] action and actor"; from action and actor should be understood the rest of beings.

CHAPTER 9

Critique of Priority

1. That of which there is seeing, hearing, etc., and feelings, etc., exists prior to them--so say some.

2. For how will there be seeing, etc., by a non-existing being; hence that being is established prior to them.

3. By what is indicated (*prajñapyate*) that being which is established prior to seeing, etc.?

4. Moreover, if that [being] is established without seeing, etc., those [faculties] would also exist without it, no doubt.

5. Someone [a subject] is manifested (*ajyate*) by something [an attribute]; [an attribute] is manifested by [a subject]--how can there be [a subject] without [an attribute], and how [an attribute] without [a subject]?

6. No [subject] is found prior to all [acts of] seeing, etc.; [that which is the subject] of seeing, etc., is manifested at other times by another [faculty].

7. [But] if no [subject] is found prior to all [acts of] seeing, etc., how is that prior [subject] of seeing, etc., found [for each act] separately?

8. If the same one is the hearer, seer, feeler, it would exist prior to each one [separately], and this is not admissible.

9. If on the other hand the seer is one, the hearer another, the feeler another--such being the case, the hearer would be in the seer; there would be a plurality of selves.

10. This [prior subject] is not found, moreover, in those elements (*bhūta*) out of which exist [the faculties of] seeing, hearing, etc., and feelings, etc.

11. If that of which there is seeing, hearing, etc., and feelings, etc., is not found, they also are not found.

12. That which is not found prior to seeing, etc., [nor] present [with them], [nor] subsequent [to them]--there the fabrications (*kalpanā*) "is [and] is not" are abandoned (*nivṛtta*).

CHAPTER 10

Critique of Fire and Fuel

1. If that which is the fuel is the fire, [there would be] an identity (*ekatva*) of actor and action; if the fire is other than the fuel, it would exist without the fuel.

2. It would be eternally lit, without cause of lighting; existing so, moreover, starting [it would be] pointless, and it [would be] inactive (*akarmaka*).

3. Because of [its] independence (*nirapekṣatva*) of another it [would be] without the cause of [its] lighting; eternally lit, moreover, the pointlessness of starting [it] follows.

4. Because of this, if at this point [you say], "that being-burned is the fuel," when this [fuel] is just such, by what would the fuel be burned?

5. [If the fire is] other it is not reached, not reached it will not burn, not burning it will not go out, not going out it will remain possessed of its own mark (*svaliṅgavan*).

6. If fire is other than fuel it could reach the fuel, as a woman touches a man or a man a woman.

7. Fire [would be] indeed other than fuel [and] could reach the fuel, granted, if fire and fuel existed separately from each other.

8. If fire is dependent on fuel, [and] if fuel is dependent on fire, which is effected prior (*pūrvaniṣpanna*), which [would make] fire dependent on fuel?

9. If fire is dependent on fuel [there would be] the establishing (*sādhana*) of an [already] established fire; and such being the case, the fuel will also exist without fire.

10. That being which is brought about (*sidhyate*) dependently, brings itself about dependent upon something; if that which is to be depended upon has [yet] to be brought about, what is dependent upon what?

11. That being which is brought about dependently, how [can] it depend (*apekṣate*) [while still] unbrought-about? And [if you say that what has already been] brought about depends, dependence does not apply to it.

12. Fire is not dependent upon fuel, fire is not independent of fuel; fuel is not dependent on fire, fuel is not independent of fire.

13. Fire does not come from another, fire is not found in the fuel--the rest [about] fuel was said [in the critique of] motion.

14. Moreover, fuel is not the fire, nor is fire apart from the fuel; fire is not possessed of fuel, [pieces of] fuel are not in the fire, the fire is not in them.

15. The whole method [of criticizing] self and dependency is explained by [the critique of] fire and fuel, together with [the examples of] the pot and the cloth, etc.

16. Those who teach the togetherhood (satattva) of self and beings, [or that they exist] separately (pṛthakpṛthak)--I do not consider them skilled in the meaning of the teaching [of the Buddha].

CHAPTER 11

Critique of the Extent of Past and Future

1. "A past extent (*koṭi*) is not known," said the Great Sage, for the samsara is without finish or start; there is no beginning nor end of it.

2. How could there be a middle of that for which there is no start nor finish? Therefore the sequences (*sahakrama*) of before and after do not occur here.

3. If birth were before, age and death would be later; birth would be without age and death, and one would be born immortal.

4. If birth were after, age and death would be at the beginning; how could age and death, causeless, exist for something unproduced?

5. And birth together with age and death is not admissible; one would die while being born, and both would exist causelessly.

6. Where these sequences of before and after do not prevail (*na prabhavanti*), how can they conceptualize (*prapañcayanti*) that birth and that age and death?

7. [As well as] effect and cause, characterized and characteristic, feeling and feeler, and whatever things exist?

8. Not only is there found no prior extent of samsara; no prior extent for all beings is found.

CHAPTER 12

Critique of Suffering

1. Some maintain that suffering is self-made, other-made, made of both, or causeless--but [suffering] as something make-able (kārya) is not admissible.

2. If it were self-made, it would not exist dependently then, for these aggregates arise dependent on these [other] aggregates.

3. If these existed [as] other than those, or if those were other than these, suffering would be other-made, since those are made by these others.

4. If suffering is made by one's own person (svapudgala) [which is] on the other hand [in itself] without suffering, what is that own-person through which suffering is self-made?

5. If suffering is produced by another person to whom it is given [in turn], that suffering having been made by the other, how [can] he be without suffering?

6. If suffering is produced from another person, who is the other person who without suffering [and] having made it,

7. Because of the non-proof of self-made, whence is other-made suffering, for the suffering which the other would make would be self-made for him?

8. Thus suffering is not self-made, for it is not made by one[-self]; if the other is not self-made, how can suffering be other-made?

9. Suffering would be made by both [only] if it were made [separately] by each one. Not having another as maker nor itself as maker, how [could] suffering be causeless?

10. Not only are the four modes (cāturvidhya) of suffering not found, the four modes of external beings are not found.

CHAPTER 13

Critique of Formations

1. "That which is characterized by deception (*moṣadharma*) is false (*mṛṣā*)," said the Lord; and all formations are characterized by deception, hence they are false.

2. If that which is characterized by deception is false, what, in such a case, is deceived? But this was said by the Lord in explanation of emptiness.

3. Because of the seeing of becoming-otherwise (*anyathābhāvadarśana*) is the non-own-being-ness of beings; without own-being a being does not exist, hence the emptiness of beings.

4. Of what would there be becoming-otherwise if there is no own-being? Of what would there be becoming-otherwise if there is own-being?

5. Becoming-otherwise is not admissible for the one nor for the other; since a youth does not age, since an old man does not age.

6. If there were becoming-otherwise of that, milk would be [the same as] curds; there will be the being-curds of anything other than milk.

7. If there were something non-empty, there would exist something [to be called] "empty." And there exists nothing non-empty, whence will there be the empty?

8. Emptiness was proclaimed by the Conquerors as the remedy (*niḥsaraṇa*) to all views; but those were declared incurable (*asādhya*) for whom there is a view of emptiness.

CHAPTER 14

Critique of Relation

1. The seeable, seeing, and seer--these three separately, not separately, or all together do not come into relation (saṁsarga).

2. So should be seen passion, the impassioned, and the object of passion, and the remainder of the three-fold afflictions and the sense-fields (āyatanas).

3. By means of an other [there is] relation to something; and otherness of the seeable, etc., is not found, hence they do not come into relation.

4. And not only is the otherness of seer, etc. not found--otherness does not occur of anything along with anything [else].

5. An other is dependent upon [another] other; an other is not other than another without an other; and that which is dependent on something does not occur [as] other from it.

6. If an other is other than an other, it would also exist without [that] other; and without the other that other is not an other, hence it does not exist.

7. Otherness is not found in the other nor is it found in [what is] not other; and when otherness is not found, there is neither an other nor a that [to which something is other].

8. A relation of this with that [or] of one thing to another, is not admissible; the [presently] being-related, the related, and the relator also are not found.

CHAPTER 15

Critique of Own-Being

1. The arising of own-being from causes and conditions is not admissible, for own-being arisen from causes and conditions would be derivative (*kṛtaka*).

2. But how can there be derivative own-being, for own-being is [by definition] non-derivative and independent (*nirapekṣa*) of another.

3. When own-being does not exist, how can there be derived-being (*parabhāva*), for derived-being means the own-being of derived-being.

4. Apart from own-being and derived-being, how can there be being? When own-being or derived-being exist, being is proved.

5. If there is no proof of being, non-being is not proved, for [it is] the becoming-otherwise (*anyathābhava*, change) of being [which] people call non-being.

6. Those who see own-being, derived-being, being, and non-being--they do not see the reality in the teaching of the Buddha.

7. In the Discourse with Kātyāyana both "is" and "is not" are denied by the Lord [who] makes manifest being and non-being.

8. If there were is-ness by nature (*astitvaṁ prakrtyā*), there could be no is-not-ness of it, for the becoming-otherwise of [what is so by] nature never occurs.

9. [Such a] nature not existing, of what will there be otherwiseness (*anyathātva*)? And [that] nature existing, of what will there be otherwiseness?

10. "Is" is the notion of the eternalism, "is not" is the view of annihilationism; therefore the clear-sighted should not adhere to is-ness and is-not-ness.

11. For eternalism [says], "there exists something by [its] own-being, it does *not* exist." "It does not exist now, it did exist before," thus follows annihilationism.

CHAPTER 16

Critique of Bondage and Release

1. If the formations (*saṁskāras*) transmigrate they do not transmigrate [as] permanent, nor do they transmigrate [as] impermanent; for a being (*sattva*) too is [to be used] the same method.

2. If the person (*pudgala*) transmigrates, searched out in the five ways[1] in the aggregates, sense-fields, and elements (*dhātu*), it does not exist--who will transmigrate?

3. Transmigrating from dependency (*upādāna*) to dependency, there would be a destruction (*vibhava*); [as] destruction and without dependency, how will anyone transmigrate?

4. Nirvana of the formations does not occur in any way; nirvana of a being does not occur in any way.

5. The formations, subject to arising and passing away, neither become bound nor become released; as before, a being neither becomes bound nor becomes released.

6. If dependency is bondage, that which has dependency does not become bound, what is without dependency does not become bound; is [any] condition then bound?

7. Granting that bondage would bind, it would exist prior to the bindable, and that [case] does not exist. The rest has been said [in the critique of] motion.

8. The bound does not become released, and likewise the unbound does not become released; if [what was] bound were being released, bondage and release would be simultaneous (*yugapad*).

9. Those for whom there is the notion "free of dependency I shall attain nirvana, nirvana will be mine"--for them there is a great notion out of dependency.

10. Where there is no attribution (*samāropa*) of nirvana nor abolishing (*apakarṣaṇa*) of samsara, there what samsara and what nirvana are fabricated?

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[1] Cf. MMK 22.1.

CHAPTER 17

Critique of Action and Fruit

1. The thought (*cetas*) which controls the self and is kindly towards others, friendly--that is the Dharma, and it is the seed of fruit after death as well as here.

2. Intention (*cetanā*) and [that which] follows intending (*cetayitvā*) were called action (*karma*) by the Supreme Seer. The multiple distinction of that action has been shown--

3. In that [regard], the action called intention is said to be mental, while that called "following-intending" is bodily and verbal.

4. Speech, gesture, and those [inner] persistences (*avirati*) [in evil ways] called non-intimations (*avijñapti*); so [also] the other non-intimations called desistences (*virati*)--

5. The merit following enjoyment, and demerit of the same sort, and intention: these seven dharmas are said to be the manifestations of action.

6. If it endures until the time of its [retributive] ripening, that action would go on permanently (*anityatām iyāt*); if [it is] stopped, how, being stopped, will it produce [its] fruit?

7. That series (*saṁtāna*) which has a sprout as its beginning develops from a seed; thence is the fruit, and without the seed [the series] does not develop.

8. Since the series is because of the seed and the arising of the fruit is because of the series, the fruit is preceded by the seed; therefore [the seed] is neither cut-off nor eternal.

9. Therefore that which is the series of thought (*cittasaṁtāna*) develops from a thought (*cetas*); thence is the fruit, and without the seed [the series] does not develop.

10. Since the series is because of the thought (*citta*) and the arising of the fruit is because of the series, the fruit is preceded by action; therefore [the intending action] is neither cut-off nor eternal.

11. The ten bright action-paths are the means for the realization (*sādhanopaya*) of the Dharma; the five objects of desire (*kāmaguṇa*) are the fruit of the Dharma after death as well as here.

12. There would be many and great errors if this [preceding] fabrication (*kalpanā*) were to be; therefore here this fabrication does not occur.

13. I shall propose, on the other hand, *this* fabrication which is applied here, [which was] elaborated by Buddhas, Pratyekabuddhas, and Disciples.

14. As the unperishing (*avipranāśa*) is like a [promissory] note, so is action like the debt. By elements (*dhātutas*) it is four-fold, and by nature it is undefined (*avyākṛta*).

15. [It is] not to be got rid of by renunciation, but rather by [meditational] development (*bhāvanā*) is it god rid of; therefore the fruit of actions is produced by the unperishing.

16. Were it to be got rid of by renunciation of the action or by [one's] migration (*saṁkrama*) [to another body], then errors would follow--loss of the [retributive] action, etc.

17. But when there is [a new] reconstitution (*pratisaṁdhi*) of all similar and dissimilar actions, together with the elements, the [unperishing retributive effects of action] originates as a unity.

18. And it originates in the present life from each [separate] action, [which is] of two kinds, and even when ripened it endures.

19. It is stopped through avoidance of the fruit or because of death; in it should be distinguished a division [into that] with outflows and [that] without outflows.

20. Emptiness and no cutting-off, samsara and not eternal, and the unperishing of action--[this is] the Dharma taught by the Buddha.

21. Why does action not occur? Because it is without own-being; and since it is unoriginated, it does not perish.

22. If action existed because of own-being, it would no doubt be eternal, and action would be undone, for [what is] eternal does not get done.

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23. If action were not done, there would be fear of being visited by the [retribution for an action which was] not done; and in that case, the error of an unchaste life (*abrahmacaryavāsa*) would follow.

24. All practical [affairs would be] contradicted, no doubt, and no distinction of meritorious and evil deeds [would] be admissible.

25. The ripening of [action which is already] ripened will ripen again, if action is fixed (*vyavasthita*) and hence has own-being.

26. And this action is essentially the afflictions (*kleśātmaka*), but those afflictions are not [according to] reality; if those afflictions are not [according to] reality, how would action be [according to] reality?

27. Action and the afflictions were declared the conditions of bodies (*dehānāṁ pratyayāḥ*), and if action and the afflictions are empty, what talk [is this] of bodies?

28. The man wrapped in ignorance and [who has] thirst [as his] bondage, he is the enjoyer, and he is not different from the actor nor is he just that [actor].

29. Since this action is neither originated by conditions nor is it not produced by conditions, therefore the actor also does not exist.

30. If the action and the actor do not exist, whence would exist the fruit produced by action? And the fruit not existing, whence will be the enjoyer [of it]?

31. As a master creates an apparition (*nirmitaka*) through the excellence of [his magic] powers, and that created apparition creates another in turn--

32. So is the actor of an apparitional aspect, [and] the action done by him is just like a further apparition created by an apparition.

33. Afflictions, actions, bodies, actors, and fruits [are] appearances of a Gandharva city, like a mirage or a dream.

CHAPTER 18

Critique of Self

1. If the self were the aggregates, it would be subject to arising and passing away; if the self were other than the aggregates, it would be without the characteristics of the aggregates.

2. When the self does not exist, how can there be [anything pertaining to] a self? From the stilling (*śama*) of self and belonging-to-self [one] is free of mine and free of ego (*nirmamo nirahaṁkāraḥ*).

3. And he who is free of mine and free of ego is not found, moreover. He who sees "free-of-mine" and "free-of-ego" does not see.

4. When "mine" and "I" are destroyed, both outside and [with regard to] the self, dependency (*upādāna*) is stopped; from the stopping of that is the destruction of birth.

5. From the destruction of the afflictions and [retributive] action is release. The afflictions and action are from fabrication (*vikalpa*), they are from verbal-conceptualization (*prapañca*), but verbal conceptualization is stopped in emptiness.[1]

6. "Self" is taught, "non-self" is also taught, "no self nor non-self at all" is also taught by the Buddhas.

7. When the domain of thought (*cittagocara*) is given up the nameable (*abhidhātavya*) is given up; for the nature of reality (*dharmatā*), like nirvana, is unoriginated and unstopped.

8. Everything is true or not true, both true and not true, neither true nor not true: this is the instruction of the Buddhas.

9. Not dependent on another, pacified, unmanifested by verbal expression (*prapañcair aprapañcita*), free of fabrication, not diverse--this is the character of the real (*tattvasya lakṣaṇa*).

10. If something arises dependently it is not *that*, nor, moreover, is it other; therefore it is neither cut-off nor eternal.

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[1] Perhaps read *śūnyatayā*. Cf. Jong, *Cinq Chapitres*, p. 10, n. 27.

11. Not one, not diverse, without cutting-off, not eternal: this is that teaching-ambrosia (*śāsanāmṛta*) of the Buddhas [who are] the guides of the world.

12. When there is no origination of the fully enlightened, and there is a perishing of the disciples, from the non-relation (*asaḿsarga*) of the alone-enlightened (*pratyekabuddha*) comes forth knowledge.

CHAPTER 19

Critique of Time

1. If present and future are dependent on the past, present and future will be in the past.

2. If, on the other hand, present and future are not there, how would present and future be dependent on it?

3. Moreover, there is no proof of them not depending on the past; therefore there is no present and future time.

4. By this method should be characterized the remaining two in reverse, [as well as] high, low, etc., and unity, etc.

5. An unfixed time is not grasped, nor is a fixed time found which could be grasped; and how is an ungrasped time indicated (*prajñapyate*)?

6. If time is dependent upon being, whence [could there be] time without being? And no being at all exists; whence will there be time?

CHAPTER 20

Critique of Totality

1. If the result (*phala*) is produced by the totality (*sāmagrī*) of cause and conditions, and is in the totality, how is it produced by the totality?

2. If the result is produced by the totality of cause and conditions, and is not in the totality, how is it produced by the totality?

3. If the result is in the totality of cause and conditions, it could certainly be grasped in the totality, but it is not grasped in the totality.

4. If the result is not in the totality of cause and conditions, causes and conditions would be the same as no cause and no conditions.

5. A causal [means] of the result being given, if the cause is stopped there would be a dual nature of the cause: that which was given and that which was stopped.

6. A cause of the result not being given, if the cause is stopped, the cause being stopped, the result of it would be a causeless production.

7. If on the other hand the result were manifested with the totality it would follow that the producer and that which is produced are simultaneous.

8. If the result were manifested before the totality, the result would be causeless, free of cause and conditions.

9. The cause being stopped, the result would be a transferring of the cause, and a rebirth of the previously produced cause would follow.

10. [But] how could something stopped and vanished produce an originated result? Moreover, the cause remaining, how could it produce, encompassed by the result?

11. And unencompassed by the result, what result could it produce? For neither having seen [it] nor not having seen [it] does the cause produce the result.

12. For there is never found a conjoining (*saṁgati*) of a past result with a past cause nor with a not [yet] produced [cause] nor with a [present] produced [cause].

13. For there is never found a conjoining of a produced result with a not [yet] produced cause nor with a past nor [present] produced [cause].

14. For there is never found a conjoining of a not [yet] produced result with a [present] produced cause, nor with a not [yet] produced nor destroyed [cause].

15. When there is no conjoining, how can the cause produce the result? When there is conjoining, how can the cause produce the result?

16. If the cause is empty of the result, how can it produce the result? If the cause is not empty of the result, how can it produce the result?

17. A non-empty result will not be originated; non-empty it will not be stopped. It will be unstopped, unoriginated, non-empty.

18. How will the empty be originated, how will the empty be stopped? Empty, it follows that [it will be] unstopped and unoriginated.

19. The unity of cause and result never occurs; the difference of cause and result never occurs.

20. If there were unity of result and cause, there would be an identity of producer and produced. If there were difference of result and cause, the cause would be the same as no cause.

21. How will the cause produce a result which is really existent in its own-being? How will the cause produce a result which is not really existent in its own-being?

22. Causality of the non-producing does not occur; when there is no occurrence of causality, of what will the result be?

23. And this totality of cause and conditions which does not produce itself by itself, how could it produce a result?

24. The result is not totality-made nor is it not made by the totality. Without the result, how can there be a totality of conditions [for it]?

CHAPTER 21

Critique of Coming-to-be and Ceasing-to-be

1. There is no ceasing-to-be (vibhava) either with or without coming-to-be (saṁbhava); there is no coming-to-be either with or without ceasing-to-be.

2. How indeed will there be ceasing-to-be without coming-to-be? Just like death without birth, ceasing-to-be is not without an arising.

3. How will there be ceasing-to-be with coming-to-be? For birth and death are not thus found at the same time.

4. How indeed will there be coming-to-be without ceasing-to-be? For impermanence is never not found in beings.

5. How will there be coming-to-be with ceasing-to-be? For birth and death are not found at the same time.

6. Of those two for which neither with each other nor without each other is proof found, how can proof be found of them at all?

7. There is no coming-to-be of destruction nor coming-to-be of non-destruction; there is no ceasing-to-be of destruction nor ceasing-to-be of non-destruction.

8. Coming-to-be and ceasing-to-be are not found without a being; a being without coming-to-be and ceasing-to-be is not found.

9. Of the empty no coming-to-be and ceasing-to-be occur; of the non-empty no coming-to-be and ceasing-to-be occur.

10. Coming-to-be and ceasing-to-be do not occur as one; coming-to-be and ceasing-to-be do not occur as diverse.

11. Should it be for you [that] coming-to-be and ceasing-to-be are seen, coming-to-be and ceasing-to-be are seen because of delusion.

12. Being is not produced from being, being is not produced from non-being; non-being is not produced from non-being, non-being is not produced from being.

13. Being is not produced from itself nor is it produced from another; it is not produced from itself and another --whence is it produced?

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14. For one who has accepted being, the view of eternalism and annihilationism follows, for that being would be either permanent or impermanent.

15. For one who has accepted being there [can be] neither annihilationism nor eternalism, for becoming is a continuity of arising and passing away of results and causes.

16. If becoming is a continuity of arising and passing away of results and causes, the annihilation of the cause follows because of the non-recurrence of the passing away.

17. No non-existent being is admissible for an existent being with own-being, [nor is] annihilation at the time of nirvana through the stilling of the continuity of becoming.

18. When the last is stopped, the first becoming is not admissible; when the last is not stopped, the first becoming is not admissible.

19. If the first is born when the last is being stopped, the [one] being stopped would be one, [and the one] being born would be another.

20. If both the [one] being stopped and the [one] being born are not admissible, one dies in those [same] aggregates in which one is born, jointly.

21. Thus the continuity of becoming is not connected to the three times; that which is not in the three times, how can that be a continuity of becoming?

CHAPTER 22

Critique of the Tathagata

1. He is not the aggregates nor other than the aggregates, nor are the aggregates in him nor he in them; the Tathagata does not have the aggregates--what here is the Tathagata?

2. If the enlightened is dependent on the aggregates, he is not self-existent. That which does not exist by its own-being, whence is it by derived-being?

3. That which is dependent on derived-being, that occurs "without self." And that which is without self, how will that be the Tathagata?

4. If own-being does not exist, how can there be derived-being? Without own-being and derived-being, who is that Tathagata?

5. Any Tathagata undepending would exist apart from the aggregates; he would now [come to] depend and thus would exist depending.

6. Moreover, there exists no Tathagata non-depending on the aggregates; and he who does not exist non-depending [now], how will he [come to] depend [later]?

7. And no undepended-upon dependency exists, and no Tathagata exists free of dependency in any manner.

8. He who being examined in five ways does not exist [by his own] reality or by otherness, how can he be indicated (*prajñapyate*) [to be a] Tathagata by the dependency?

9. Moreover, that which is this dependency, that is not found through its own-being; and that which does not exist by own-being, whence is it by derived-being?

10. Thus the dependency and the depender are entirely empty, and how is an empty Tathagata indicated by [what is] empty?

11. Neither "empty" nor "non-empty" should be said, nor both nor neither; but they are said for the sake of an indicator (*prajñapti*).

12. Here in the pacified, whence the four-fold [view], eternal, not eternal, etc.? And also whence, here in the pacified, the fourfold [view], with an end, endless, etc.?

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13. He who has conceived the gross notion that the Tathagata exists [or] does not exist, [in his] fabricating he would also fabricate [such notions] of the extinguished [Tathagata].

14. In this [Tathagata?] empty by nature (svabhāvatas) there does not occur the thought that after cessation [one who is] enlightened either exists or does not exist.

15. Those who conceptually express (prapañcayanti) the enlightened [which] are forever beyond conceptual expressions, all of them, struck down by [their] expression, do not see the Tathagata.

16. Of what is the own-being of the Tathagata, of that is the own-being of this world; the Tathagata is without own-being, this world is without own-being.

CHAPTER 23

Critique of Error

1. Desire, hatred, and delusion are said to proceed from fabrication (*saṁkalpa*), for they arise dependent on the pleasant (*śubha*), the unpleasant, and errors [respectively].

2. [And] those [afflictions] which arise dependent upon the pleasant, the unpleasant, and errors--they are not found [to exist] through own-being; therefore the afflictions are not [in accord with] reality (*tattvatas*).

3. The is-ness and is-not-ness of the self are in no way proved; without that [self], how are is-ness and is-not-ness of the afflictions [to be] proved?

4. For these afflictions are *of* someone, but that someone [cannot be] proved [to exist]; without a someone, [can] the afflictions be no one's?

5. As with the own-body view (*svakāyadṛṣṭi*), the afflictions are not in the afflicted [when they are searched out] in the five ways;[1] as with the own-body view, the afflicted is not in the afflictions.

6. Pleasant, unpleasant, and errors are not found [to exist] through own-being; dependent upon what pleasant, unpleasant, and errors are the afflictions?

7. Forms, sounds, tastes, touches, odors, and dharmas--the set of six is fabricated [as] the object (*vastu*) of desire, hatred, and delusion.

8. Forms, sounds, tastes, touches, odors, and dharmas are isolated (*kevala*), appearances of a gandharva city, like a mirage or a dream.

9. Whence in those [six, which are] like a magical man (*māyāpuruṣa*) and like a reflection, will pleasant or unpleasant be?

10. The unpleasant, dependent upon which we could explain the pleasant, does not exist independent of the pleasant, hence the pleasant does not occur.

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[1] Cf. MMK 22.1.

11. The pleasant, dependent upon which we could explain the unpleasant, does not exist independent of the unpleasant, hence the unpleasant does not occur.

12. When pleasant is not found, whence will be desire? When unpleasant is not found whence will be hatred?

13. If the notion that the permanent is in the impermanent is an error, [since] the impermanent is not found in the empty, how is the notion an error?

14. If the notion that the permanent is in the impermanent is an error, why is the notion that the impermanent is in the empty not also an error?

15. That by which one conceives, that which is the notion, the conceiver, and the conceived--all are pacified; therefore no notion is found.

16. A notion not being found, either false or correct, whose would be the error, whose the non-error?

17. Moreover, errors do not arise for the [one who has already] erred, nor do errors arise for the [as yet] not in error.

18. Nor do errors arise for the [one presently] erring. Consider yourself: for whom do errors arise?

19. Not [yet] originated, how will there be errors? When errors are [still] unproduced, how [can there be] one who has come into error?

20. "Being[2] is not produced from itself, nor is it produced from another, nor from itself and from another"--how can there be one who has come into error?

21. If self, the pure, the permanent, and happiness are found, [then] self, the pure, the permanent, and happiness are not errors.

22. If self, the pure, the permanent, and happiness are not found, [then] non-self, non-pure, impermanent, and suffering are not found.

23. Thus ignorance is stopped from the stopping of error; when ignorance is stopped, the formations, etc., are stopped.

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[2] Some versions omit this stanza. Cf. May, *Prasannapadā*, n. 656.

24. If any afflictions existent through their own-being were of anyone, how would they be eliminated? Who is going to eliminate own-being?

25. And if any afflictions were of anyone not existent through his own-being, how would they be eliminated? Who is going to eliminate the non-existing?

CHAPTER 24

Critique of the Aryan Truths

1. If everything is empty, there is neither arising nor disappearing [of things], and the non-being of the four Aryan truths follows for you.

2. Because of the non-being of the four Aryan truths, recognition [of suffering], elimination [of the cause of suffering], development [of the way leading to the cessation of suffering], and realization [of the cessation of suffering]--do not occur.

3. And because of their non-being, the four Aryan fruits[1] are not found; if [there is] non-being of the fruits, there are none who abide in the fruits nor aspirants [to them].

4. The Sangha does not exist if those eight personages do not exist, and because of the non-being of the Aryan truths the True Dharma also is not found.

5. The Dharma and the Sangha not existing, how will there be a Buddha? Speaking thus, you reject the three jewels.

6. [Speaking of] emptiness, you reject the real existence of fruits, right and wrong, and all worldly practical affairs.

7. Here we say that you do not know the purpose of [the doctrine of] emptiness, the meaning of emptiness, [or] emptiness, and hence you are distressed.

8. Resting upon two truths is the Dharma-teaching of the Buddhas: the worldly superficial truth and truth from the ultimate [standpoint].

9. Those who do not discern the distinction [between] these two truths, do not discern the deep reality in the teaching of the Buddhas.

10. Without resorting to pragmatic truth (vyavahāra), the ultimate is not shown; and not arriving at the ultimate [truth], one does not attain nirvana.

11. Emptiness wrongly seen destroys the dull and dim-witted, as [does] a snake wrongly grasped or wrongly executed [magic] spells.

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[1] Viz., Entering the Stream, Once Returning, Never Returning, and Arhatship. Cf. MMKV 478.4f.

12. Thus the mind of the Sage was turned away from teaching, when he considered how difficult it would be for the dull to penetrate.

13. Moreover, the objection (*adhilaya*) to emptiness which you make--the erroneous consequence is not ours; that does not occur in the [truly] empty.

14. Of whatever emptiness is admissible, everything is admissible; of whatever the empty is not admissible, everything is inadmissible.

15. Causing your own errors to fall on us, you are unmindful of the horse you are mounted upon.

16. If you see real being of beings [existing] because of own-being, such being the case, you see beings [which are] without causes and conditions.

17. You reject effect, cause, actor, instrument, action, origination, cessation, and fruit.

18. That which is dependent origination we call "emptiness" --it is a useful indicator (*prajñaptir* *upādāya*), [and] just that is the middle way.

19. Since no undependently-originated dharma is found, no non-empty dharma is found.

20. If everything is not empty, there is neither arising nor disappearing [of anything], and the non-being of the four Aryan truths follows for you.

21. Not dependently-originated, whence will there be suffering? The impermanent is called suffering, [and] that is not found in [what] is self-existent.

22. Existing by [its] own-being, what, moreover, will come to be? Hence for him who rejects emptiness there [can] be no coming-to-be [of suffering].

23. Of a suffering existing through own-being there is no cessation; because of the obsession of own-being you reject cessation.

24. If the self-existent exists, the development of the Way does not occur; [and] that Way is [indeed] produced, [so] your self-existent is not found.

25. When there is no suffering, origin, and cessation, what Way, is due to the cessation of suffering, [will be obtained]?

26. If non-recognition [of suffering exists] by own-being, how, on the contrary, [will there ever be] recognition of it? Is not own-being [completely] fixed?

27. Elimination, realization, and development thus, like recognition, are not admissible, nor [are] the four fruits.

28. How would it be possible, for one who conceives of own-being, to obtain a fruit which is not [already] obtained by nature?

29. If [there is] non-being of the fruits, there are none who abide in the fruits nor aspirants [to them]; the Sangha does not exist if those eight personages do not exist.

30. And because of the non-being of the Aryan truths the True Dharma also is not found; the Dharma and the Sangha not existing, how will there be a Buddha?

31. An Enlightened One not dependent upon enlightenment also follows for you, and enlightenment not dependent upon an Enlightened One also follows for you.

32. He who is not enlightened by nature, even striving towards enlightenment in the career of a bodhisattva he will, for you, [never] attain enlightenment.

33. And no one will ever do right or wrong: what can be done to the non-empty, since own-being is not affected [by action]?

34. For you, there is [karmic] fruit without [antecedent] right or wrong [action], and there is no fruit, for you, [which has] right and wrong as its cause.

35. Or else if for you there is the fruit [which has] right and wrong as its cause, originated by right and wrong, how [can] the fruit be non-empty for you?

36. You reject all worldly practical affairs since you reject the emptiness of dependent origination.

37. There would be nothing [which] could be done, action would not be begun, the actor would be inactive, for [one who] rejects emptiness.

38. The world will be unproduced, unstopped, unchanging, deprived in [its] own-being of [its] varying conditions.

39. There is no obtaining of the unobtained, making an end to suffering, and elimination of all the afflictions, if the non-empty [exists].

40. He who sees dependent origination sees this, as well as suffering, [its] origin, [its] cessation, and the Way.

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CHAPTER 25

Critique of Nirvana

1. If everything is empty, there is neither arising nor disappearing [of things], [and so] from the getting-rid of or cessation of *what* is nirvana sought?

2. If everything is not empty, there is neither arising nor disappearing, [and so] from the getting-rid of or cessation of *what* is nirvana sought?

3. Not avoided, not attained, not cut-off, not eternal, not stopped, not originated--this is called nirvana.

4. First of all, nirvana is not an entity (*bhāva*) characterized by age and death; for if there exists an entity, it follows [that it is] not without age and death.

5. If nirvana is an entity, nirvana would be composite (*saṁskṛta*), for there is no non-composite entity anywhere.

6. If nirvana is an entity, how [can it be] non-depending? For there is no [such] entity [as] a non-depending (*anupādāya*) nirvana.

7. If nirvana is not an entity, how will it be non-entity? Where nirvana is not an entity, no non-entity is found there.

8. And if nirvana is non-entity, how [can it be] non-depending? For there is no [such] non-depending non-entity which [would be] nirvana.

9. What is conditioned by or dependent on the conditions of coming and going, that, without conditions (*apratītya*) and independent (*anupādāya*) is taught [to be] nirvana.

10. The Master spoke of the getting-rid of becoming and annihilation, therefore it is admissible [to say] that nirvana is neither entity nor non-entity.

11. If nirvana were both entity and non-entity, release would be entity and non-entity, and that is not admissible.

12. If nirvana were both entity and non-entity, nirvana would not be independent, for it would be dependent on both [of these].

13. How could nirvana be both entity and non-entity? Nirvana is non-composite, while entity and non-entity are composite.

14. How could nirvana be both entity and non-entity? There is no existence of those simultaneously (*ekatra*), just as [there is none] of light and dark.

15. The notion (*añjana*) that nirvana is neither entity nor non-entity could be proved if [the notion] entity and non-entity were proved.

16. If there is a nirvana [which is] neither entity nor non-entity, how is that "neither entity nor non-entity" [to be] imagined (*ajyate*)?

17. It is not maintained that the Lord exists after cessation, nor does not exist, nor both, nor neither.

18. It is not maintained that the presently living (*tiṣṭhamāna*) Lord exists, nor does not exist, nor both, nor neither.

19. There is no distinguishing whatsoever of samsara from nirvana; there is no distinguishing whatsoever of nirvana from samsara.

20. The extent (*koṭi*) of nirvana is the extent of samsara; there is not even the tiniest interval between them.

21. The views that after cessation "[there is] an end," etc., and "[one is] eternal," etc. depend upon [the notions of] nirvana, the future, and the past.

22. All dharmas being empty, what is endless [and] what has an end, what is [both] endless and has an end, what is neither endless nor has an end?

23. What, indeed, is "that," what "another," what eternal, what not eternal, what eternal and not eternal, or even neither then?

24. [The Dharma which is] the stilling of all concepts (*upalambhopaśama*), the benign stilling of verbal expression (*prapañca*)--no [such] Dharma was taught by the Buddha to anyone anywhere.

CHAPTER 26

Critique of the Twelve Limbs

1. Those formations which one, wrapped in the three-fold ignorance, forms--by those actions one goes to [a new] state (gati) for repeated-becoming.

2. Consciousness, having the formations as its condition, enters into the state, and then consciousness having entered, name-and-form is infused.

3. Name-and-form having been infused, [there is] the arising of the six fields; the six fields having appeared, contact develops.

4. [The faculty of] the eye is dependent upon form and [their] bringing-together (*samanvāhāra*); thus depending upon name-and-form, consciousness develops.

5. The conjunction of the three--form, consciousness, and eye--is contact; from that contact develops feeling.

6. Thirst has feeling as its condition, for the object of feeling is thirsted for; the thirsting one depends on (*upādatte*) the four-fold dependency.

7. Dependency existing, becoming of the depender develops; for if he were without dependency he would be released, [and] there would be no becoming.

8. The five aggregates are that becoming; from becoming develops birth, age, death, suffering, etc., sorrows and lamentations,

9. Dejection and despairing--this develops from birth; thus is the arising of this isolated (*kevala*) aggregate of suffering.

10. Thus the ignorant one forms the formations, the roots of samsara; therefore is the ignorant one the cause [of suffering], not the knower, because of his seeing reality (*tattvadarśana*).

11. Ignorance being stopped, there is no arising of the formations; but the cessation of ignorance is because of the [meditational] development (*bhāvana*) of this [cessation?] through knowledge.

12. Through the cessation of each one, each [of the following] does not come about; thus is correctly stopped this isolated aggregate of suffering.

CHAPTER 27

Critique of Views

1. The views, "was I?", "was I not in past time?", the eternality of the world, etc.--these are based on the past.

2. The views, "shall I not be?", "shall I be another in future time?", an end [to the world], etc.--are based on the future.

3. "I existed in time past"--this does not occur, for he who was in past births is not [the same as] this [present] one.

4. If it were [so that] "that one *is* [this] self," dependency is distinct; but what self [can there be] for you [which is] free of dependency?

5. If it is maintained, "there is no self free of dependency," if the self were just the dependency, [it follows] for you again that there is no self.

6. For the self is not just the dependency: that rises up and disappears. And how indeed will the dependency be the depender?

7. On the other hand, the self does not occur apart from the dependency, for if it [were] other, it could be conceived (*gṛhyeta*) [distinct from its] dependency, but [that way] it is not conceived.

8. Thus it is not different from the dependency nor is it [just] the dependency; the self does not exist apart from the dependency, nor is it certain that it does not exist.

9. "I did not exist in time past"--this does not occur, for this one is not different from the one who was in past births.

10. For if this one were different, it would exist in disregard of (*pratyākhyāya*) that one, which would remain just such--in this case one would be [re-]born not having [previously] died.

11. It follows [that there would be] annihilation, destruction of actions; the experiencing of acts done by one would be by another; and so on.

12. Nor, moreover, having been non-existent [would the self] have come to be, for here an error follows: either the self would be [something] derivative (*kṛtaka*), or [it would have] arisen without cause.

13. Thus there does not occur the view, "I existed in the past," "I did not exist," or both, or neither.

14. The view, "shall I exist in future time?" and "shall I not?"--this is the same as with time past.

15. If the god [incarnation] and the man [incarnation] are the same, this is eternalism; and the god would be unoriginated, for the eternal is not produced.

16. If the man is different from the god, there would then be non-eternalism; if the man is different from the god a continuity (*saṁtati*) does not occur.

17. If one part is divine and one part human, there would be non-eternalism and eternalism [together], and that is not admissible.

18. Moreover, if both eternal and non-eternal are proved, neither-eternal-nor-non-eternal [could] be proved, it is granted.

19. [If it could be said that] someone arrived somewhere from somewhere could go somewhere, then samsara would be beginningless, but [such a one] does not exist.

20. If there is nothing eternal, who will be non-eternal, or eternal and non-eternal, or apart from both of these?

21. If the world had an end, how could there be another world? Moreover, the world [being] endless, how could there be another world?

22. Since this continuity of aggregates proceeds, like [that] of the flame of a lamp, neither an end nor endlessness are admissible.

23. If they are broken off in the past, and these aggregates did not originate dependent on those [former] aggregates, the world would have no end.

24. If they are not broken off in the past, and these aggregates did not originate dependent on those, the world would be endless.

25. If one part had an end and one part were endless, the world would [both] have an end and be endless, and that is not admissible.

26. In the first place, how will one part of the depender be destroyed and one part not be destroyed?--such as this is not admissible.

27. How indeed will one part of the dependency be destroyed and one part not be destroyed?--this also does not occur.

28. If end and endless both are proved, also proved is neither-endless-nor-with-an-end, granted.

29. Moreover, because of the emptiness of all beings, where, of what, (and) whence will what views of eternalism, etc., come to be?

30. I honor Gautama, who relying on compassion, taught the true Dharma for the getting rid of all views.

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